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The Society of United Irishmen and the Rebellion of 1798

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THE SOCIETY OF UNITED IRISHMEN AND THE REBELLION OF 1798

A Thesis

Presented to

**The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia**

In Partial Fulfillment

**Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts**

by

Judith Anne Ridner

1988

APPROVAL SHEET

**This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of**

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

The Society of United Irishmen was one of many radical political clubs founded across the British Isles in the wake of the American and French Revolutions. First established as a reformist organization, its members sought to promote gradual changes in the political and social structures of Ireland. However, the ideological radicalization of the Society's leaders and the active suppression of openly reformist political activity by the Anglo-Irish government, drove the Society underground and transformed the United Irishmen into a close-knit military coalition of Protestants and Catholics ready to fight for the revolutionary cause of Irish independence.

As the culmination of nearly a decade of planning and careful negotiations with the French Directory for assistance, the Rebellion of 1798 was a great disappointment to the United Irishmen. Although it was intended to be a great revolutionary upheaval of anti-British sentiment in Ireland, the Rebellion was little more than a series of isolated peasant insurrections across the Irish countryside. The Irish rebels were an unprepared, ill-equipped, and poorly trained match for the combined forces of the Anglo-Irish governments. With little real assistance from the French, they were defeated quickly by their British rivals. Although some political and social reforms followed, Ireland retained its "dominion status."

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THE SOCIETY OF UNITED IRISHMEN AND THE REBELLION OF 1798

CHAPTER I

The Setting

As one of the most visible events in the complex process of social and political transformation that swept Europe in the final decades of the eighteenth century, the French Revolution, like its predecessor, the American Revolution, was a model worthy of emulation for a whole generation of would-be reformers and political radicals across the vast continent of Europe. Fuelled with the revolutionary ideals of "liberté, égalité, fraternité" and hopeful of financial and military assistance from the French "mother-land," these political radicals pushed forward with their long-held grievances and challenged the ancient, yet delicate balance of monarchical Europe.

Ireland was one of the many places ignited by the fervor of foreign revolution. Like so many other small European states, Ireland was subsumed by a vast monarchical-parliamentary empire that dictated the political status and the socio-economic conditions of its people. To the Irish, America was a source of inspiration, while France offered them the possibilities of ideological guidance, financial sustenance, and military aid. The birth of modern Irish republicanism stemmed from an unwavering faith in the public actions and political ideologies of such revolutionary nations. The increasing radicalization of the Irish

population resulted in a social and political crisis during the 1790s that "followed a similar pattern to that of many other countries with sizable revolutionary groups looking to France (and America) for support and inspiration."¹

While the Irish republican movement of the 1790s may have represented a "general" European response to the French and American Revolutions, the events and the final outcome of the Irish rebellion of 1798 were unique. In continental nations such as Poland or Belgium the radical minority encompassed only a small segment of the total population. For these nations, a successful revolt depended largely upon French military intervention. Ireland was one exception to the general rule. The Irish revolutionary movement was led by the Society of United Irishmen, a republican political society headed by an elite group of Protestant radicals who were actively supported by a majority, pro-French and pro-American, Catholic population.² Although they were ultimately unsuccessful in their attempts at revolution, the United Irishmen not only rebelled with mass support, they also gained financial and military assistance from the French.

In the late eighteenth century, Ireland was an island colony whose social structure was marked by internal class divisions and political barriers. Great contrasts between wealth and poverty and between privilege and discrimination separated vast segments of Ireland's population from one another. With an already large and ever-increasing population, social tensions worsened and the existing gaps between Irish social classes widened. In just the years between 1750 and 1800 Ireland's population grew by almost fifty percent. While in 1767 there

were approximately two and a half million Irishmen, by 1800 there were close to four and three-quarter million--a number that accounted for almost one-third of the total population of the British Isles. Naturally, such rapid growth placed considerable pressure upon Ireland's social and political structures.³

Despite the increases in population, class distribution remained unequal. The Irish social structure was pyramidal in shape with a very broad base that narrowed to a sharp point on the top. Irishmen were divided into three distinct socio-economic classes. There was little social mobility or interaction between the various groups. The rights of political power and land ownership were reserved largely for an elite class of Anglo-Irish referred to as "the ascendancy." While this centuries-old Anglican aristocracy made up approximately one-tenth of the total population, they owned nearly five-sixths of the land, occupied most government positions, and controlled the Irish Parliament in Dublin. In Ireland, land ownership meant political power and social status for a small number of privileged "gentlemen."⁴

Ireland's version of a middle-class encompassed a wide range of incomes and occupations. While most men were Protestant businessmen or merchants (particularly the Presbyterian merchants and linen manufacturers of Ulster and Dublin), lawyers, doctors, and other professionals were also included in this category, as were some well-to-do farmers. Although this group reflected a great diversity of interests and talents, many were enlightened men of considerable education and some wealth. Perhaps more importantly, these men stood mid-way between the great extremes of Irish wealth and poverty. While

they were only second-hand witnesses to the injustices suffered by Ireland's peasants, they themselves endured the economic and political discrimination of Ireland's ruling agrarian elite. Therefore, it is not surprising that these men formed the bulk of Ireland's radical leaders and were the first to call for reform and ultimately revolt.⁵

The Roman Catholics made up the remaining three-quarters of Ireland's population. As the members of a "conquered" race, and "speaking a language that was despised, professing a religion that was abhorred," these Irish natives "found themselves in many cases slaves, even in the bosom of written liberty."⁶ Although these three million people formed the mass of Ireland's population, they were regarded as strangers to the dominant Anglo society. They had few civil or criminal rights, were legally barred from holding public office, and were largely relegated to lowly careers as artisans, cotters, and laborers. Irish uprisings during the American Revolution resulted in certain political concessions from the Anglo-Irish government that included a law that permitted Catholics to own their own land. Unfortunately, increasing land values meant that very few men could afford to take full advantage of this privilege. Instead, the overwhelming majority of Ireland's Roman Catholics lived as impoverished peasants.⁷

While legal restrictions barred Irish Catholics from most forms of active public participation in their society, social conditions deprived them of high economic status. As peasants, they were usually subject to the eccentricities of an Anglo-Irish landlord, who all too often behaved as "a sort of despot who yielded obedience. . .to no law but that of his will."⁸ Isolated from his tenants by differences in language, religion,

and national allegiance, the landlord saw his estate only as a lucrative source of income. Such mercenary attitudes placed added economic pressures upon tenant farmers.⁹ Besides the inherent economic uncertainties associated with a dependency upon agricultural production, Ireland's rural masses were also burdened by a sharp rise in tithe rates and rent levels and increased governmental duties on leather, whiskey, beer, and tobacco from the mid 1780s until 1797. For the average peasant, the combination of these factors meant little if any surplus cash each year and only aggravated his already chronic state of poverty.¹⁰

Ireland's peasants knew few, if any, material comforts. Accustomed to squalid and unsanitary living conditions, even the clothes they wore were generally ragged. Poverty created a clothing shortage in Ireland that was remedied with second-hand imports. While this was a source of inexpensive clothing, such dirty imports also brought various diseases into Ireland.¹¹ Housing conditions were no better. Most Catholics resided in small one-room dwellings or cabins that often housed more than one family. The traveller Arthur Young referred to such structures as: "the most miserable looking hovels that can well be conceived."¹² These buildings generally consisted of mud walls, thatched roofs, a single chimney, and one door to allow for the circulation of some light and air to the interior. Starkly furnished, even beds were rare commodities in such dwellings. Instead, in most cases "the family lay on straw, equally partook of by cows, calves, and pigs."¹³

As a colony of England, it is no surprise that Ireland's social and economic development lagged behind that of her European neighbors.

Ireland remained overwhelmingly dependent upon traditional techniques of production. The existing linen industry still operated on a cottage basis, with flax being woven in the homes of peasants on an intermittent basis.¹⁴ Most importantly, Ireland's colonial economy was only one piece of the larger British mercantilist system. As a result, protective legislation was placed upon those goods (such as linen and wool) that would best supply the ever-expanding British economy.¹⁵ For Ireland this meant that she "was not allowed to trade directly with any other nation, but was forced to receive her supplies and necessities of life directly from Great Britain, so that the English people could alone be the recipients of all profits."¹⁶

When compared to the industrial progress made by many other European nations, Ireland was economically primitive. The prevalence of small farms made it difficult to apply the latest agricultural technologies. Furthermore, the phenomenon of absentee landlords made room for an exploitive group of middlemen in Ireland. Concerned only with profit, these men would lease large amounts of land directly from the landlord and subsequently sub-let it to peasants at extraordinarily high rents. As a result, the general lack of capital among peasants worsened and the absence of any merchant or middle class in the Irish countryside meant that peasants had little incentive to change.¹⁷ Even Ireland's leading industries of brewing, distilling, linen, and wool manufacture were based upon agricultural products. Although economic output was increasing in the late eighteenth century to meet the needs of a growing population, Ireland remained largely a country of poor and uneducated peasants.¹⁸ Many of Ireland's more fortunate men recognized the economic and social

backwardness of their nation and knew that it must be corrected soon. With shame for Ireland and scorn for England, these men readily admitted that economic opportunities were few and "the lower order of the people" of their land had "less means of being enlightened than the same class of people in any other country."¹⁹

It is not surprising that Ireland's governing structure virtually mirrored the actions and intentions of the dominant British system based in London. After all, as a colony inhabited by a majority population of disenfranchised Roman Catholics, it was vitally important for the English to remain firmly in control. Only the outcries of the Irish for political freedom and their accompanying threats of violence during the American Revolution prompted the passage of the Constitution of 1782, which granted the Irish government greater legislative and judicial independence from England. While this document bestowed great privilege upon Ireland's Parliament, it offered them little real responsibility or change in their "dominion" status.

In theory, the Irish Parliament of the 1790s had the power to regulate its own internal affairs, conduct its own foreign policy, and impose its own custom tariffs--in practice, such power was negligible at best. Although the British Parliament could no longer legislate for Ireland, the royal veto and a very powerful influence over Ireland remained. Without an Irish ministry or executive body that was directly responsible to the Irish Parliament, more often than not, the combined strength of the British Parliament and the King's Privy Council managed to guide, if not control most actions and ideological stands taken by the Irish government. While the Lord Lieutenant and Chief Secretary were the

Irish equivalents of the British Prime Minister, they were Englishmen appointed and instructed by British government. Unattached to the Irish Parliament, these men could be easily and quickly dismissed by the British government if they granted too many concessions or were too sympathetic to pleas of the Irish colonials.²⁰

By the end of the century, the religious, economic, and social barriers that separated Irish Presbyterians from Catholics were weakened greatly. The combination of higher duties on consumer goods, the almost universal opposition to the tithe, and the increased revenues needed by the British government to finance the war with France produced a clear set of grievances that were shared by Catholic and Presbyterian alike. The tithe in particular, was a constant source of agitation. As the theoretical right of the Church of England to one-tenth of the fruits of the earth, in practice the tithe was not only a burdensome tax, but was also an important factor considered when land was bought or sold, or when rents were fixed. Naturally, Catholics and Presbyterians resented paying for a church to which they did not belong and were aggravated at the random manner in which tithes were set and collected.²¹

While the tithe was and had been a matter of considerable anger and controversy, it was the French Revolution that finally fused Ireland's two diverse religious groups into a single, anti-British coalition. Like the many other "oppressed" masses of Europe, it was the triumph of the French bourgeoisie that "inspired the advocates of change in all parts of the British Isles with verve," and gave them "a sense of being participants in a great European drive against tyranny and anachronistic privilege." But most importantly, it assured the Irish "that their cause

would soon triumph."²²

Ireland may have lagged behind her fellow European nations in social, economic, and political development, but a very active oral culture brought the events and the ideological principles of the American and the French Revolutions directly to the minds and hearts of the Irish masses. Aside from middle-class literary and political societies designed to popularize and promote the "republican way," Ireland had a very active and politically diverse press. This meant that revolutionary political ideas were widely disseminated among the broad range of the Irish citizenry. Daily reports of the struggles and triumphs of the revolutionaries bound the middle-class merchants of Ireland to their bourgeois counterparts in America and France.²³

With over sixty-five Irish newspapers in print in the early 1790s, the press played a central role in the dissemination of information to the people. In the Irish crusade for reform and later revolt, the distribution of printed pamphlets and newspapers helped to mobilize the people. After all, it was in the daily press releases that "the French revolution" like the earlier American Revolution, "burst upon the world. . .presenting images of blood and disorder, but coming as the messenger of harmony and freedom to the afflicted nations."²⁴ The ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity spread quickly among the general population. Particularly as the French Revolution progressed and the people rejected both king and the Constitution of 1791, it became clear to enthusiastic observers in Ireland that "all ranks and degrees, all classes and descriptions of persons, the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, the old, the young, and the

middle-aged, all rejoiced and were exceedingly glad."²⁵

While, in Ireland "the people and the press emulated each other in their congratulations, and in their praises and glorifications of France, and of the French people," they also recognized that this momentous overthrow of established authority had broad historical significance.²⁶ Most importantly, the model of the successful revolt in Catholic France convinced many Irish Protestants that their fellow Roman Catholic countrymen were not as "unfit for liberty" as they had assumed previously. The shared economic and political grievances of the "Irish people" and the need for mass support eased many Protestant reformers into "what previously would have been considered an unnatural alliance with the Catholics."²⁷ Even the bloodletting of the Reign of Terror and the anti-British sentiment that characterized France during the war years, could not discourage the Irish in their unwavering and idealized faith in the Revolution. Throughout the 1790s, their actions and beliefs were guided by an "excessive sense of optimism in French goodwill."²⁸

While the Irish had battled against the political, economic, and social repression of the Anglican aristocracy for decades, it was the tales of the American and French Revolutions that illuminated their long list of grievances and pushed them to action. Like the many other nations of Europe that witnessed these important historical events, Ireland "became animated by a new-born vigour. . .and, as if awaking from a long slumber, imagined that they had discovered in the old social bonds the shackles that enslaved them."²⁹ Such models of successful revolution, inspired the Irish to organize themselves around a solid program of reform and revolution. While the American Revolution

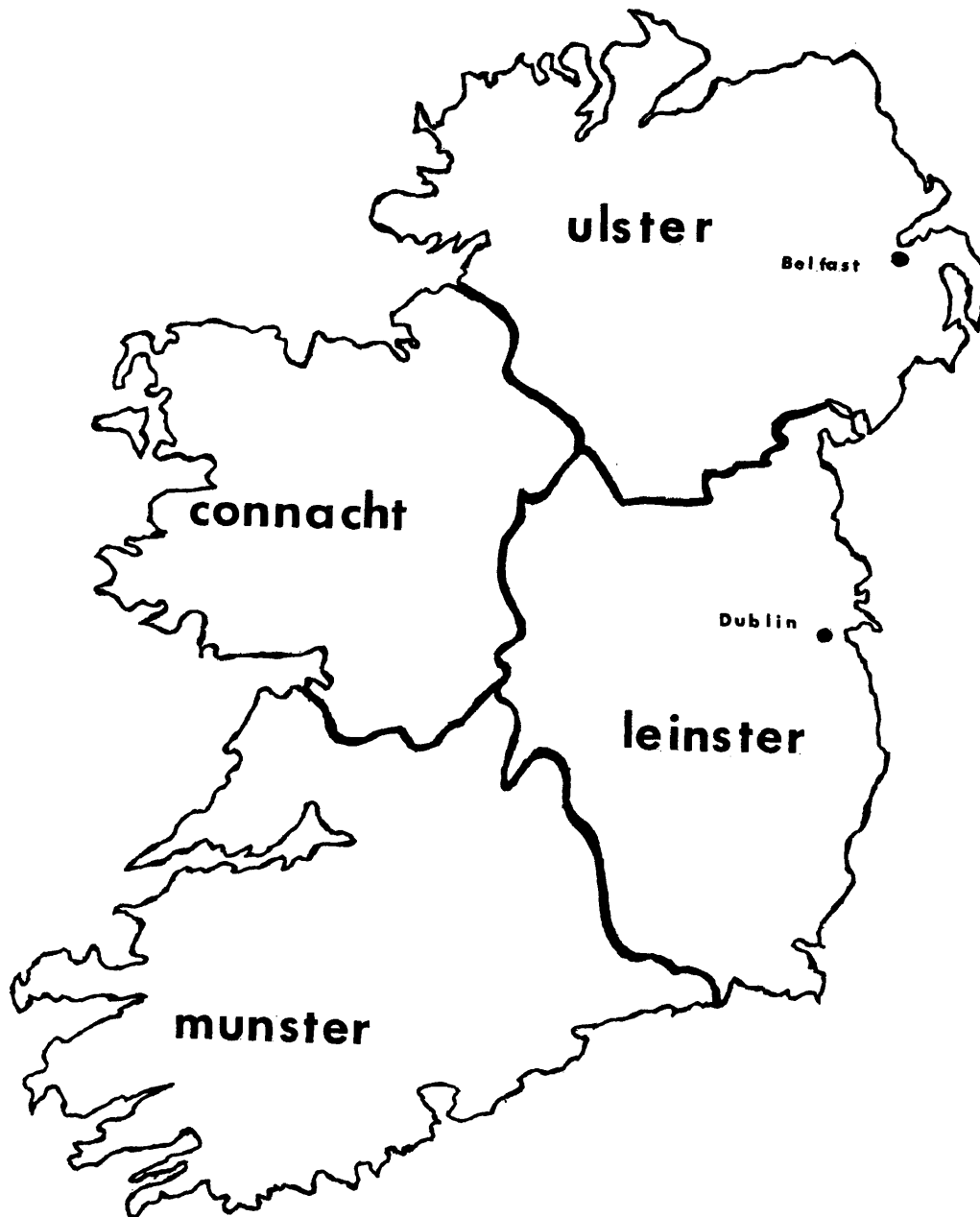
encouraged reform, it was the French Revolution that "changed in an instant the politics of Ireland."³⁰ While only a few years previously Ireland had been politically lethargic and socially disorganized, by 1790 the Irish were infused with a renewed sense of public spirit. A frenzied urgency accompanied the daily news from France. Theobald Wolfe Tone, a founder of the United Irishmen and later their ambassador to France, was one of the most interested and excited observers of the time. He summarized the sentiments of many of his fellow countrymen when he remarked that since "we well knew, experimentally, what it was to be enslaved, we sympathised most sincerely with the French people, and watched their progress to freedom with the utmost anxiety."³¹

From the beginning of the revolt in America in 1776 and in France in 1789, the Irish were ideologically and emotionally tied to their revolutionary "compatriots" and suffered both their setbacks and triumphs. To the Irish, these revolutions created a spell that "rendered them more and more impatient of their grievances, and prompted them to more energetic exertion, to break asunder every link of the chains by which they felt themselves galled."³² A bond of understanding, compassion, and many shared social circumstances united the Irish middle-classes to their bourgeois "brothers" of America and France. As an example of such sentiments, Bastille Day was celebrated in Belfast on July 14 of 1790 and 1791, "with an indescribable enthusiasm, never witnessed there on any occasion before nor since."³³ Participants carried banners that bore the likenesses of Franklin and Mirabeau. One person even held an illuminated globe "on which the New World, America, was represented as shedding a blaze of light on the Old World,

Europe."³⁴ While this commemoration of American and French achievements symbolized Ireland's sympathy for her fellow men, more importantly, July, 1790 marked "the first open demonstration of the political sentiments of the leading spirits of republicanism" that played a crucial role in Irish politics throughout the 1790s.³⁵

To a nation whose masses were held in check by class distinctions and economic restrictions, the American and French Revolutions were idealized symbols of national achievement. They offered Irishmen the hope that tyranny, despotism, and corruption could be swept away and representative government and financial opportunity instituted in their place. The Irish observed first-hand how the initiation of increased social and political rights was translated into a new sense of national unity in America and France. As social divisions worsened and taxes and tithes continued to rise, increasing numbers of Irishmen were convinced that they, like their fellow revolutionaries, could shape the destiny of their nation.³⁶

MAP 1
PROVINCES OF IRELAND



NOTES TO CHAPTER I

¹Marianne Elliott, Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), xiv.

²Ibid., 3-4.

³R.B. McDowell, Ireland in the Age of Imperialism and Revolution 1760-1801 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1979), 4 and Gearoid O. Tuathaigh, Ireland Before the Famine 1798-1848 (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 1972), 5-6.

⁴McDowell, 44. For a general overview of class structure in Ireland see: R.R. Palmer, The Age of the Democratic Revolution: The Struggle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), II, 492-93 and Sir James O'Connor, History of Ireland 1798-1924 (New York: Edward Arnold and Co., 1926), 7-8, 14.

⁵McDowell, 41-43.

⁶Young Arthur, A Tour in Ireland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925), 189.

⁷Albert Goodwin, The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 419, 423, and McDowell, 176.

⁸Young, 190.

⁹K.H. Connell, The Population of Ireland 1750-1845 (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1975), 62-63.

¹⁰David Dickson, "Taxation and Disaffection in Late Eighteenth-Century Ireland," in Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest, Samuel Clark and James S. Donnelly (eds.), (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 48.

¹¹Connell, 222-223.

¹²Young, 186-187. Although Young made his comments in 1777, his first-hand observations remain appropriate throughout the 1790s.

¹³Ibid., 187-188.

¹⁴O'Connor, 16-17.

¹⁵Edith Mary Johnston, Ireland in the Eighteenth Century (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1974), 77.

¹⁶Thomas Addis Emmet, Ireland Under English Rule, I (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1903), 4.

¹⁷Connell, 62-63, 67, 83.

¹⁸McDowell, 8-21 and Tuathaigh, 2-4.

¹⁹Speech on freedom of the press given by John Philpot Curran at libel trial of Archibald Hamilton Rowan, Report of the Trial of Archibald Hamilton Rowan, Esq. (New York: Tiebout and O'Brien, 1794), 56.

²⁰Johnston, 152-156 and W.E.H. Lecky, A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 190-193, 197-198.

²¹McDowell, 165-167 and Lecky, 120-121.

²²McDowell, 363 and Dickson, 58.

²³Elliott, 15-16.

²⁴William Henry Curran, The Life of the Right Honourable John Philpot Curran (New York: William H. Creagh, 1820), 204.

²⁵John Binns, Recollections of the Life of John Binns (Philadelphia: Parry and M'Millan, 1854), 52.

²⁶Ibid., 52.

²⁷Elliott, 52.

²⁸Ibid., 54.

²⁹Curran, 205.

³⁰R. Barry O'Brien, (ed.), The Autobiography of Theobald Wolfe Tone 1763-1798 (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1893), I, 38.

³¹Ibid., 39.

³²William Hamilton Drummond, (ed.), The Autobiography of Archibald Hamilton Rowan, Esq. (Dublin: Thomas Tegg and Co., 1840), 153.

³³Ibid., 153.

³⁴Binns, 25.

³⁵William Grimshaw, Incidents Recalled or Sketches From Memory (Philadelphia: G.B. Ziebar and Co., 1848), Manuscripts and Rare Books Department, Swem Library, College of William and Mary, 22.

³⁶McDowell, 355, 369 and Tom Garvin, The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1981), 16. Garvin suggests that many sections of the peasantry believed that the seventeenth-century confiscations of land would be reversed. Garvin argues such beliefs were bolstered by a combination of poetry and prophecy.

CHAPTER II

We Will Not Buy Nor Borrow Our Liberty

For a nation such as Ireland, where political participation and economic opportunity were reserved for the privileged few, the American and French Revolutions were far more than isolated events of the North American or European continents. Rather, such momentous defeats of monarchical authority marked turning points in the histories of England, France, and all the nations of Europe. The revolutionary notion that "the people" could triumph over the social oppression and political corruption of an aristocratic elite inspired debate, reform, and finally, open rebellion in Ireland. With the American Revolution as their inspiration and the French Revolution as their example, radical members of Ireland's "middle-class" organized their ranks and mobilized mass support around the issues of Parliamentary reform, Catholic emancipation, and the abolition of tithes, in the hopes that open revolt against England and Irish independence would be the eventual result.

The French Revolution in particular, had an immediate impact upon Irish politics. It was in the early and very critical years of the Revolution, from 1789 to 1791 that various political radicals and social reformers merged to form the Society of United Irishmen. Not surprisingly, this radical political organization of Protestants and

Catholics whose ultimate origins lay in the political aftermath of the American Revolution, borrowed its "character and principles as well as its actual foundation" directly from "the reformist, universalist and republican ideals of the French Revolution."¹

Founded first in Belfast in 1791 and in Dublin in 1792 (see map 1), the Society of United Irishmen began as one of many reform associations that sprang to life in the midst of the public uproar over the American and French Revolutions. As one part of a larger network of British radical organizations centered in London, the Society drew many of its ideological principles and political methods from its counterparts in England and Scotland.² However, The Society of United Irishmen quickly distinguished itself as the "most radical and most influential of all the British political clubs generated by the reform euphoria of the 1790s"³ with its calls for an Irish revolution with French assistance. Unlike the United Irishmen, the demands of most British radical organizations were not consciously revolutionary. Rather, they sought far more traditional reforms of Britain's long-standing political and social institutions.⁴

As the most publicly conspicuous and socially influential political organization of eighteenth-century Ireland, the United Irishmen had a self-appointed duty to Ireland that they took very seriously. As a result, they attracted "a membership impressive in wealth, intellectual ability, and social standing."⁵ The Society drew many of its leaders from among the most qualified and well-educated men of Ireland's business and professional classes. In its first years, the Dublin club claimed that there were over 360 men "admitted" to their Society. Of the total

of 360, there were approximately 200 active members and an average meeting attendance of 50-90 men. While some members came from the professional class of lawyers or barristers, the majority of the Dublin Society, like the other clubs, consisted of successful tradesmen, cloth merchants, and textile manufacturers whose businesses suffered from the economic ill effects of the British mercantilist system.⁶ Of those 200 active members, there were 80 reported Protestants and 73 Catholics. This proportion is typical of most clubs. Despite Ireland's overwhelmingly Catholic population, the bulk of the United Irish leadership in these early years came almost exclusively from the urban Protestant classes of Dublin or Belfast.⁷

While the most urbanized, affluent, and well-educated Protestants monopolized the leadership of the United Irishmen, the Society still enjoyed a substantial popular following among many Protestants and Catholics of the Irish countryside. Because clubs existed in Armagh, Clonmel, Gorey, Limerick, Lisburn, Nenagh, Sixmilewater, Templepatrick, and Tullamore as well as in Belfast and Dublin, the Society's membership extended to a broad range of Irish society.⁸ However, their influence remained particularly strong in the more prosperous regions of the north, east, and midlands and in the suburban areas in and around the cities of Belfast and Dublin. Membership increased in number and strength in the more modern, commercialized towns and cities of Ireland, where better roads and increased commerce meant improved communication networks that facilitated the dissemination of information about the Society and its political ideologies.⁹

From the founding of the first club in 1791, the Society's leaders

were intent upon the organization of a cohesive public force in an effort to create "a general union of sentiment among the various classes" of Ireland "upon whose co-operation they were to depend."¹⁰ Their goal was to bring all Irishmen together, regardless of economic class or religious persuasion, to form a united front of opposition to British policies and practices. To do so, the United Irishmen played upon the strong anti-British sentiment that already existed among so many of their fellow citizens. Always stressing the importance of Irish national pride, the Society was ultimately successful in its attempts, because it brought Irishmen together in small, organized groups in which "Protestants and Catholics--all religious sects, forgot their prejudices and nobly rallied under one common standard--the standard of the nation."¹¹

As Ireland's primary reformist political organization of the early 1790s, the stated goals of the United Irishmen included fairly moderate calls for changes in the structure and intent of Irish politics and society. In these early years, the Society's leaders publicly labelled themselves as republicans "in the manner of the classical republicanism of the English 'country' or 'real Whigs.'" They "accepted monarchy" in theory, but "sought to curb the powers of central government, to preserve fundamental liberties, and to secure religious toleration."¹² They felt a great sense of social responsibility towards Ireland and her people. The masthead of the Society's newspaper the Northern Star summarized such feelings when it proclaimed in 1791, "The Public Will our Guide--The Public Good our End."¹³

At this time, the social and political objectives of the United Irishmen were quite simple and very straightforward. After considerable

deliberation and debate among Society leaders, the United Irishmen decided upon a public platform that would attract the greatest number of Irishmen to their cause. Their plan included calls for Parliamentary reform, Catholic emancipation, and the reduction or peaceful elimination of English influence in the Irish government.¹⁴ With nearly three million Irishmen excluded from active political participation, the United Irishmen recognized that there was a great reservoir of social power that lay dormant in Ireland. The possibility of such a social force at their disposal only encouraged the United Irishmen. It meant that the issue of a property qualification for the franchise was dismissed quickly by the Society. Instead, full support was put behind a public platform that called for universal manhood suffrage and Catholic emancipation in addition to a reform of Parliament.¹⁵ The Dublin club summarized what they felt were the beliefs of all Irishmen when they stated:

The great object of this Society is a real representation of the Irish Nation in an Irish Parliament; and as friends of the whole People, we support the necessity of Catholic emancipation as a means of making representation what it ought to be, Free, Equal, and Entire.¹⁶

The creation of an independent Irish republic was not an openly stated goal in the first years of the Society, despite the convictions of many United Irish leaders. After all, such founders as Theobald Wolfe Tone and James Napper Tandy were ardent and radical republicans.¹⁷ Tone readily admitted that he "was a Democrat from the very commencement" and characterized his friend Tandy as "a very sincere republican."¹⁸ Dr. William Drennan, one of the founders of the Dublin club, had written as early as 1791 that the Society would have "the Rights of Men and the Greatest Happiness of the Greatest Number as its end," but "Real

independence to Ireland, and Republicanism" would be "its particular purpose."¹⁹ Led by a group of political radicals who felt close ideological ties to the French and American revolutionaries, the Society's shift to more overtly radical republican policies was virtually inevitable. Many members of the United Irishmen recognized early on, that Parliamentary reform and Catholic emancipation were touted as the objects of their organization only to gain mass backing and to pacify their more moderate supporters. In reality, the "real Purposes" of the United Irishmen "were to separate Great Britain from Ireland, and to subvert the present Constitution."²⁰

As the French Revolution progressed, the news of its events formed an increasingly large and important part of the daily lives of Irishmen. Greater numbers of Irishmen imitated the French style of manners and dress and a National Guard was formed in Dublin.²¹ In light of the French accomplishments, English power appeared far less formidable than ever before. While it was not spoken of openly, the possibility of a successful Irish revolt loomed in the future. To many United Irishmen, it was clear that the time was ripe for a substantial change in the Society's public platform, for "political questions, both foreign and domestic, and the enacting of several unpopular laws, had advanced the minds of many people, even before they were aware of it, towards Republicanism and Revolution."²²

The Society's relatively moderate calls for reform no longer suited the restless mood of Ireland. Archibald Hamilton Rowan, secretary of the Dublin club, reported that as the United Irish movement spread among the general public, policies took on a life of their own. While calls for

Parliamentary reform and Catholic emancipation had initially answered the demands of most United Irishmen, soon "nothing less than separation from England would satisfy some of the leaders (and the followers), who thought this might be accomplished by the assistance of France."²³

Plans for an independent Parliament with legislative membership open to Irishmen of all religious persuasions was no longer enough to satisfy many. Instead, as the sense of national pride and purpose expanded, the notion of an independent Ireland became increasingly important to Society members. As the self-appointed representatives of Ireland, the United Irishmen responded with a vow that: "We will not buy or borrow liberty from America or from France, but manufacture it ourselves, and work it up with those materials which the hearts of Irishmen furnish them with at home."²⁴

It was upon the outbreak of war between France and England in February 1793 that the public character of the United Irishmen underwent a gradual but significant transformation from a club of urban social reformers into a "militantly anti-English, anti-monarchical republican movement" that was the direct result of "the reaction of a general European crisis upon the peculiar historical situation in Ireland."²⁵ Compounded by the already unsettling events of the Revolution, the political and social disruptions of war were enough to finally change the United Irishmen "from a small and ineffectual group of radical reformers . . . into a secret, oath-bound and hierarchical organization led by ardent republicans" and finally "into an armed and mass insurrectionary levy, prepared to act in an auxiliary role to French invasion forces."²⁶

In the eyes of most Irishmen, the war of the First Coalition drew

clear battle lines between the despotic monarchies of Europe and the noble republic of France. Never before had the United Irishmen's call of "Citizen Soldiers, to arms!" elicited such an emotional response from their fellow countrymen.²⁷ Within the Society it was a commonly held belief that "every man should become a Soldier in the defence of his rights."²⁸ To those United Irishmen who were already committed to the ideals of republicanism, if not the notion of full Irish independence, the grand nation of France was undoubtedly innocent of all possible wrongdoings. Upon the outbreak of hostilities in 1793, the Dublin Society publicly decreed that: "This Society is convinced that this war would never be carried on, if it did not tend to effectuate a treaty, or rather a conspiracy, entered into by tyrants and abettors of tyranny." To the members of a nation battling against British colonial authority and political oppression, it appeared that, "France had committed no crime, unless the emancipation of 24 millions of men be one."²⁹

In the wake of this great European crisis, nothing appeared "more natural" and "more seasonable" to the United Irishmen than that "those (Irishmen) who had common interests, and common enemies, who suffered common wrongs, and lay claim to common rights, should know each other, and should act together."³⁰ Yet, the Society still faced the dilemma of how to translate their specific political goals and ideologies into a more general formula that was attractive to the mass of Ireland's poor and uneducated peasants. While they had the active support of Ireland's middle-classes, many United Irishmen wisely recognized that "there was a fund of strength and indignation in the Irish people," (particularly among the lower classes of Roman Catholics), "which, if skillfully

directed, would vanquish every obstacle."³¹ In order to achieve the mass mobilization necessary to create a revolution, Society leaders needed to channel the long-held anger and resentment of the nation's Roman Catholics into the energy of their organization.³²

In an effort to create a substantial national following, the Society of United Irishmen reorganized and redefined the structure and intent of their organization. Between 1794-1796, the Society took its efforts to become a more radical political-military organization underground. To hide their efforts from the increasingly attentive Anglo-Irish authorities, the existing clubs were subdivided into smaller and more flexible units that each elected a secretary and a treasurer. To achieve a more efficient military structure, a hierarchical system of committees was established on the local, regional, and national levels. In imitation of the new French system, the committees were governed by a General Executive Directory of five elected officials.³³

While from behind the scenes, the Society was restructured to prepare for increased civil and military activity, from the public perspective, the character of the United Irishmen also changed. In an effort to attract greater numbers of the peasantry to their cause, public policies were modified. To their platform of issues, the Society added a campaign to abolish tithes and a general vow to improve the economic conditions of Ireland's laboring man.³⁴ Furthermore, political concessions made to the Catholic majority by an increasingly nervous Anglo-Irish government assisted in the radicalization of the organization. In particular, the Catholic Relief Bill of April 1793 that gave Ireland's Roman Catholics the right to bear arms, greatly helped the

United Irishmen mobilize and militarize their ranks of Catholic supporters.³⁵ By 1796, the United Irishmen had successfully convinced large segments of the Irish population that they were the sole protectors and defenders of their liberty. To a young man of Ulster, during this time it appeared that:

In every part of the kingdom, societies of United Irishmen were organized; and all my brothers. . .as well as myself... were enrolled as members; whilst arms, including pikes, were collected and manufactured, and carefully concealed.³⁶

Meanwhile in France, the years between the outbreak of war with England in 1793 and the year 1796 were marked by an increasingly aggressive foreign policy. To the United Irishmen and the many other radical organizations in existence across the European continent, the most important manifestation of this policy was the November 1792 decree in which France offered "fraternity and assistance to all people wishing to recover their liberty."³⁷ Although this policy of active intervention was later modified by the French government upon the advice of Georges Jacques Danton, it nonetheless dictated the tone and intent of Franco-United Irish relations until 1798.

The United Irishmen interpreted this decree as the equivalent of a direct offer of financial and military assistance from the French. In an organization that already supported the ideology of the Revolution, this French promise only reconfirmed the underlying republican tendencies of the Society's leaders. Motivated by such general assurances from the French, the United Irishmen launched on a determined quest for an independent Irish state even when "interference in neutral countries was entirely ruled out by the French (leaders). If the subjects of an enemy

rebelled, France would support them: but she could not be expected to foot the bill for the preliminary revolutionization."³⁸ This made little difference to the United Irishmen, who flocked to Paris in these early years to promote and even plead their cause to the French.³⁹

1792 marked the opening phase of Franco-United Irish relations. Encouraged by the anti-British war propaganda running rampant in Ireland and by the pro-revolutionary policies of France, the United Irishmen looked increasingly to France as a potential source of financial and military aid. Ideological guidance was no longer sufficient to sustain a nation mobilized for insurrection. Instead, the Irish radicals needed tangible support from the French to carry out a successful revolt against England. At the same time in France, the political leaders first began to view the United Irishmen as a potentially powerful and highly lucrative political force that could be employed as an effective weapon against their English enemies.

In the Paris of the early 1790s, many Irish radicals-in-exile pressured the French government to consider the desperate situation of Ireland and the possibility of direct intervention. The French leaders finally conceded to Irish wishes and sent an American, Lieutenant Colonel Eleazer Oswald to survey the situation in May 1793.⁴⁰ After a tour of the nation and meetings with various officials including Lord Edward Fitzgerald,⁴¹ Oswald concluded that "though there was plenty of discontent in Ireland there was little likelihood of a popular rising in the immediate future."⁴² While his pronouncement was a great disappointment to the United Irishmen, it was not his statement, but the internal French political crisis of the Reign of Terror that temporarily

terminated the first diplomatic exchanges between France and the United Irishmen.

As their organization grew larger and more radical, the United Irishmen were increasingly determined in their pursuit of French approval and support. In Paris, the workings of long-time Irish exile Nicholas Madgett, an intelligence officer in the French admiralty, convinced the French leaders to restore their dialogue with the United Irishmen. In January 1794, upon the urgings of Madgett, the Committee of Public Safety sent William Jackson as their agent to Ireland.⁴³ While there, he was to gauge the English response to a French invasion of Ireland and to "ascertain the state of public opinion in Ireland, in order to determine whether it would be desirable to invade that country."⁴⁴

Jackson was a typical example of the many Irish exiles in residence in France. He was of Irish descent, but had begun his career as a tutor in London. Later, he became an Anglican clergyman and acted as the personal companion and chaplain to the Duchess of Kingston. In 1790, swept up by the fervor of the French Revolution, Jackson emigrated to France where he played an active role in their new government. Upon his arrival in England in 1794 as emissary to Ireland for the French government, Jackson renewed an old friendship with a London attorney named John Cockayne. He hired Cockayne as a travelling companion and guide, unaware that his friend was a loyal Englishman prepared to act as a spy for Pitt and the British government.⁴⁵

Jackson was not greeted warmly upon his arrival in Dublin in April 1794. With the British government becoming increasingly aggressive in its pursuit of United Irishmen, many United Irishmen suspected that

Jackson was a British spy and refused to meet with him. Others, such as Lord Edward Fitzgerald, had doubts about French intentions and insisted that the Irish should make the first effort at revolt, utilizing the French only as allies and not liberators.⁴⁶ Only Hamilton Rowan, secretary of the Dublin Society, was confident of Jackson and his mission. Rowan agreed to meet with him from his cell in Newgate, where he was imprisoned on sedition charges. In their discussions, Jackson assured Rowan that "if the people of Ireland were inclined to reform the abuses of their government by a declaration of independence, that the French government would assist them in any way they might prefer," and most important to the Irish, "would desire no further interference."⁴⁷

Encouraged by the meeting, Rowan convinced his friend and fellow United Irish leader, Theobald Wolfe Tone to compose an official statement on the current state of Ireland for the Committee of Public Safety. Tone's essay presented a general survey of the contemporary social and political conditions in Ireland. While he confirmed that a French invasion "of sufficient force" would be supported by a majority of the Irish people, he also spoke of the need to send an "official" United Irish representative to Paris.⁴⁸ Tone later recounted the night that he composed this fateful letter. He had gone home that evening and "made a sketch of the state of Ireland. . .and the inference" of his paper "was, that circumstances in Ireland were favorable to a French invasion."⁴⁹

After transcription by Rowan, the letter was delivered to Jackson. Forewarned of the dangers of the royal mail, Jackson was foolish and mailed the letter anyway. Thanks to the work of Cockayne, the letter was intercepted by the British government and Jackson was arrested in April

1794. At his trial in 1795 he was convicted of treason by an Anglo-Irish court. However, he died from a suicidal dose of arsenic while he stood in the dock and awaited the sentence of the death penalty.⁵⁰

Naturally, the disappointing end to the Jackson mission was a great blow to the hopes of the United Irishmen. While it caused the active suppression of the organization by the British government, the Jackson letter also implicated Rowan on charges of treason and encouraged him to devise his escape from prison and subsequent flight to the United States.⁵¹ More importantly, the Jackson affair temporarily sabotaged the newly-established relations between the French and the United Irish. Although it was clear to most United Irishmen that the French leaders would respond favorably to Irish pleas for military and financial assistance in the future--how far in the future remained an unanswered question.⁵²

While the cessation of diplomatic relations with the French upset many United Irishmen, the Jackson affair coincided with, and even accelerated the consolidation and further radicalization of the Society. Many of the more conservative members were scared away by the British threats that accompanied the arrest and trial of Jackson. Those members who remained were a small, but highly dedicated group of republican radicals. These men "were totally committed to the policy of soliciting a French invasion of Ireland" in the hopes of creating an independent Irish state.⁵³ Driven underground by the active pursuit of the British government, the Society publicly adopted the more radical and revolutionary ideologies of its leaders as its official political policies.

By 1796, the transformation and militarization of the Society was nearly complete. The United Irishmen were more prepared than ever before to support a French invasion of Ireland. Their leadership was organized into a tight hierarchical structure. They had gained the support of large numbers of Ireland's peasants with their calls for Catholic emancipation, universal suffrage, and the abolition of tithes. Furthermore, in 1796 the United Irish absorbed the Catholic agrarian organization, the "Defenders" into their ranks. This move not only enlarged membership, it also furthered the cause of religious unity and "brought to the society a deeply rooted tradition of agrarian violence, and an intense hatred of the established government" at Dublin Castle.⁵⁴ Diplomatically, the events of the previous three years, including the many discussions with the French government and the missions of Oswald and Jackson, convinced the United Irishmen that France was fully committed to assisting in their future rebellion against England. "Given every reason to think that France was eager to supply military assistance," the United Irishmen mobilized their ranks, gathered weapons, and plotted possible courses of action.⁵⁵

The reorganization and enlargement of the United Irishmen occurred in spite of Anglo-Irish efforts to eliminate what they considered to be a growing amount of "politically submissive" behavior throughout the British Isles. Particularly in Ireland, the Jackson affair and the accompanying rumors of a French invasion, scared many officials Dublin Castle. It appeared that quick action was necessary to counteract the efforts of such groups as the United Irishmen. Consequently, two bills were passed that regulated behavior at public political protests. The

Treasonable Practices Bill of 1795 modified the existing treason law to include anyone who intended harm to the King, plotted to assist foreign invaders, or sought to intimidate the Houses of Parliament in speech or writing. In the same year, the Seditious Meetings Bill was also passed. This law gave local magistrates discretionary control over any public meeting of fifty or more people and required prior notice to be given before any such meeting occurred.⁵⁶

While these laws were aimed at combatting the fervor of reformist political activity across the British Isles, other acts passed by the Irish Parliament were directed specifically at the activities and practices of the United Irishmen. The Insurrection Act of 1796 made it a capital offense to administer an illegal oath or an oath that bound a person to a seditious society. Also in 1796, the Habeas Corpus Act was partially suspended. This move allowed the government to detain those persons suspected of treasonable activities with a warrant authorized by the Lord Lieutenant or Chief Secretary. Also at this time, the yeomanry was organized. They would assist the army in the event of an invasion and act in the capacities of a police force. The Irish Parliament was becoming increasingly reactionary and repressive in response to pressure from the British government. The activities of the United Irishmen had to be stopped. Yet, these laws had just the opposite effect. Although many Irishmen were arrested and prosecuted for their treasonable behaviors, these laws only made the United Irishmen more determined to further their cause and more selective of how, when, and where they would move next.⁵⁷

At the same time, France's governing body was also restructured. In

1795, a five-man Directory was established as France's principal governing body. Under the Directory, French foreign policy was guided by the personal motives and goals of the individual Directors. As a result, policy often lacked cohesion and consistency. Only a chronic shortage of funds, an increasing concern for military strategy and power politics, and a general belief that Europe might be republicanized, provided a certain amount of uniformity.⁵⁸ The liberation of Ireland was a small and insignificant matter to the French Directors. Before 1796, French leaders were curious about the Irish situation, but remained firm in their conviction to avoid any direct support for the early stages of foreign revolution. The French temporarily quelled the ever-insistent pleadings of the Irish exiles in Paris by sending first Oswald, then Jackson to Ireland to assess the political climate. However, the French refused any real commitment of their troops or money to Ireland.

Changes in the European political situation in 1796 focused the attention of the French Directors upon Ireland. Angered by the underhanded English support of the civil war in the Vendée, the possibility of an Irish invasion appeared to be the best way for France to strike a decisive blow against England. It was then, for the first time, that "Ireland assumed an important place in French strategy."⁵⁹ With revenge against England as the object of their mission, the French planned an invasion of Ireland co-ordinated with a raid into Wales as the best way to accomplish their goal. It was the "desire for revenge" among many Frenchmen that made Ireland "a special case, and the logistical difficulties of supplying and maintaining military support at a distance" that made "a swift victory more necessary and a full-scale invasion more

likely in Ireland than in any other country with a strong internal revolutionary movement."⁶⁰

1796 was the first year of the three-year Franco-United Irish partnership. At this time, France agreed to begin official discussions with the United Irishmen about the details of a French invasion. Upon the opening of quasi-official diplomatic relations between the two groups, the United Irishmen had to try to convince the French of exactly how, when, and on what terms this revolution should take place. The United Irishmen were particularly concerned that France would not only agree to sponsor their rebellion, but would also pledge to honor Ireland's independent status after it was accomplished. In spite of their seemingly good intentions, most French leaders held little regard for the political and social ramifications of an Irish revolution. In reality, they sought the most attractive and least expensive way to destroy the British. They were willing to sponsor a rebellion in Ireland only for their own benefit and any such war would be executed on French terms and under French command. France's ultimate goal was "to deal a mortal blow to England's war plans with the minimum of effort on her own part."⁶¹

To mark the start of their revolutionary partnership, Theobald Wolfe Tone travelled to Paris as the official United Irish representative to France. While there, he met with the Director Lazare Carnot, Charles Delacroix, the French Foreign Minister, and General Henri Jacques Guillaume Clarke.⁶² Carnot was the most adamantly anti-English of the French Directors and welcomed the plans for an Irish revolution in the hopes that it would be England's "Vendee."⁶³ Clarke and Delacroix were

more moderate in their intentions. They believed that French assistance should be on a smaller scale and agreed to supply the Irish rebels with arms, ammunition, and money, but no invasion forces. With a successful revolt dependent upon a full-scale French expeditionary force, this offer was totally unacceptable to the United Irishmen.⁶⁴

Tone faced a tough diplomatic battle in Paris. While the Directors agreed "to take up the business of Ireland in the strongest possible manner that circumstances would possibly admit," their offer of some thirty pieces of cannon, 20,000 stand of arms, and some money was still not sufficient.⁶⁵ To convince Clarke and Delacroix of their critical need of French assistance, Tone initially based his argument upon ideological assurances. He promised the French that he "had no doubt whatever that, if we succeeded, we would establish a Republic," and expounded upon the Society's long-term commitment to revolution.⁶⁶

More than the purity of Irish intent, Tone had to convince the French that a full-scale invasion and accompanying revolution in Ireland would bring them considerable material rewards. In this respect, his argument was solid and convincing. He asserted boldly that the United Irishmen were so widely supported that the Irish masses would flock to assist French invasion forces intent upon the establishment of a republic. Tone added that the formation of an independent Irish republic would deprive England of vital resources and manpower, while the French would gain a loyal ally, a trading partner, and a strategic-military advantage over her rival Britain.⁶⁷

Thanks to Carnot's intense hatred of England and a lingering spirit of "republican internationalism" among the French Directors, Tone's

exercise in secret diplomacy was a success.⁶⁸ The Directory agreed to "send an expeditionary force to Ireland with the aim of liberating that country and reducing England to the rank of a second-class power."⁶⁹ Two detachments of troops would sail from Brest to Galway with approximately 11,000 men. At the same time, three detachments of European recruits would sail from Holland to join the expedition. The United Irishmen gladly accepted this proposal only after it was clearly understood that the French "should come as Allies, to act under the Directions of the projected Revolutionary Government." Fearful of future debts, they also insisted that the French were to "be paid the Expenses of the Expedition, and their Troops receive Irish Pay whilst they acted here."⁷⁰ With apparent confirmations by the French, the mission was underway.

High hopes for the future revolt accompanied the French invasion forces that sailed from Brest in December 1796. The mission was under the command of Lazare Hoche, one of France's most distinguished generals. He was accompanied by an excited Theobald Wolfe Tone, dressed in full French military uniform.⁷¹ Their force of 45 ships was "well provided" with weapons, according to Tone. Upon departure, they carried approximately 41,160 stands of arms, 20 pieces of field artillery and 9 of seige, 61,200 barrels of gun powder, 7,000,000 musket cartridges, and 700,000 flints.⁷² However, there were reasons for caution upon departure. Tone knew that the French Navy had been badly hit by the purges of the Revolution. It suffered from the losses of many of its best trained aristocratic officers, its ships had undergone long periods of neglect and disuse, and morale was low following a number of defeats

at the hands of the British.⁷³

Although the expedition sailed from France to Ireland without British interception, bad weather drove them off their intended course and separated General Hoche on the frigate Fraternité from the main body of ships (see map 2). One group of ships finally made its way into Bantry Bay, a small inlet on the south-west coast of Ireland that was far south of the intended destination of Galway (see maps 2 & 3). Despite such difficulties, the commanders decided to land and lay siege to the south-west city of Cork with the 6,500 available troops (see map 2). This plan of action was doomed from its inception, for severe winter storms prevented them from landing.⁷⁴ A British naval officer observed that conditions were "so extremely bad, thick, rainy, and blowing hard," that it was "impossible for them to attempt landing troops or indeed doing any Thing."⁷⁵ Tone sadly recognized the desperate state of their mission and exclaimed: "I see nothing before me, unless a miracle be wrought in our favour, but the ruin of the expedition, the slavery of my country and my own destruction."⁷⁶ After sixteen days of bad weather, the fleet withdrew and sailed again for France--their mission of revolution an utter failure.⁷⁷

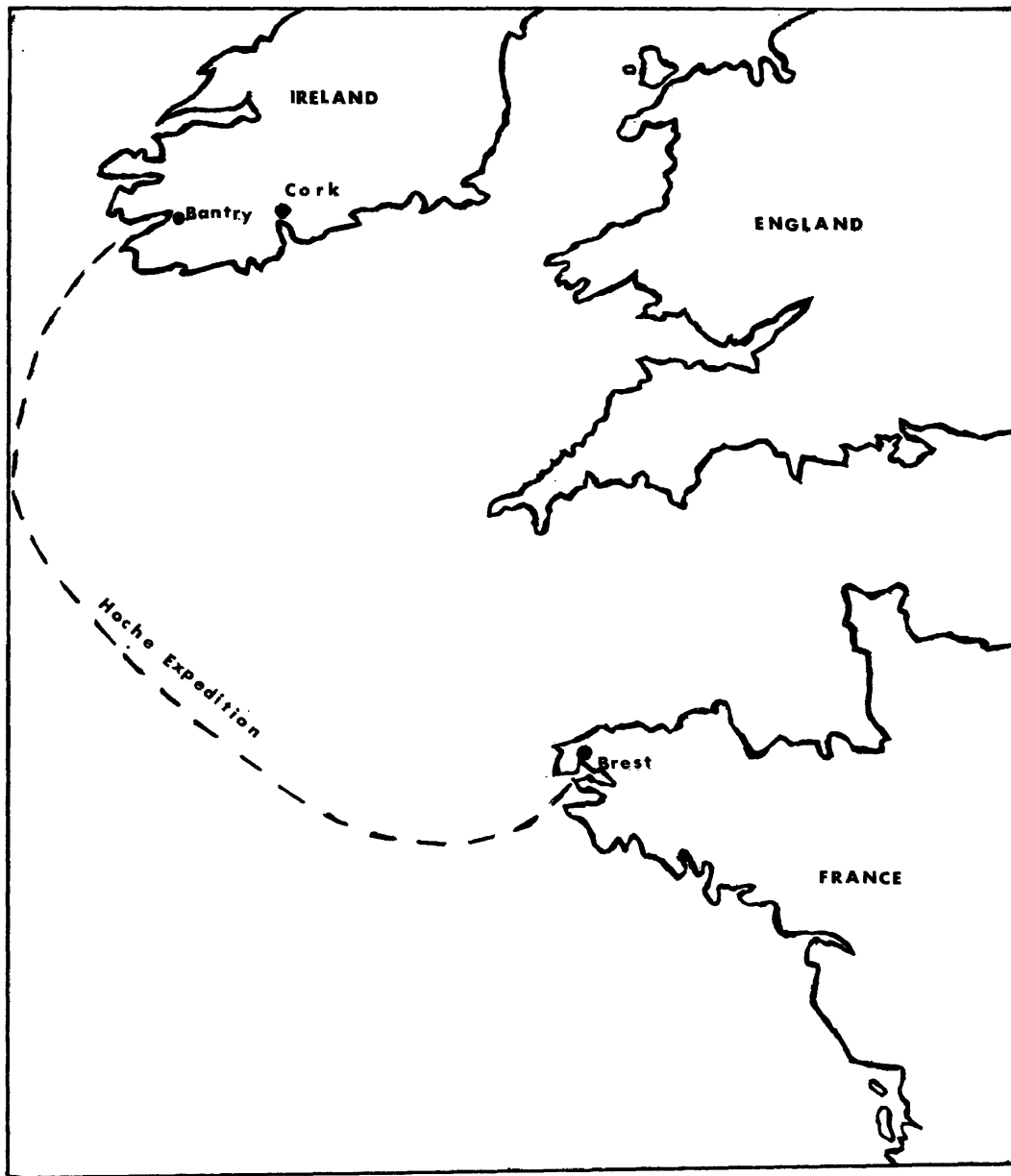
The fiasco of Bantry Bay was the first of several failed French missions that sailed before 1799 in the hope of "liberating Ireland" from the British.⁷⁸ In France and Ireland, the men involved reacted to the news of the disastrous expedition with a mixture of disappointment and frustration. The French considered the Bantry Bay excursion as an embarrassing failure and a waste of men, munitions, and money. Napoleon Bonaparte, in command of the army of Italy, believed that those troops

should have been sent to him. It was clear to most Frenchmen that "Hoche had gained nothing from this gamble."⁷⁹ Pressured by public outrage and disappointment, the Directory "re-imposed its standing policy on intervention abroad."⁸⁰

Although the failure of the Bantry Bay expedition was a great disappointment to the United Irishmen, most members refused to accept that an successful rebellion against England did not form a large and significant space in Ireland's future. After all, by 1796, the hope for an independent Ireland was no longer the secret plan of several United Irish leaders. In the five years since its inception, the Society of United Irishmen had not only grown in numbers and in strength, it had also restructured itself on a close-knit hierarchical basis, and had become openly radical and revolutionary. Supported by a fairly significant segment of the Irish peasantry and hopeful of continued assistance from France, the United Irishmen continued their calls for revolution.

MAP 2

BANTRY BAY EXPEDITION - 1798



NOTES TO CHAPTER II

¹Albert Goodwin, The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 417.

²Peter Holt and Malcolm I. Thomis, Threats of Revolution in Britain 1789-1848 (Hamden: Archon Books, 1977), 21, 26-27.

³Marianne Elliott, Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 24.

⁴Holt and Thomis, 7, 21.

⁵Elliott.

⁶R.B. McDowell, "Personnel of the Dublin Society of United Irishmen," Irish Historical Studies, II, 1940, 13-17. For a general overview of the Society and its composition see R.B. McDowell, Ireland in the Age of Imperialism and Revolution 1760-1801 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1979), 386-387.

⁷McDowell, "Personnel," 15 and Elliott, xiii.

⁸McDowell, Imperialism, 389.

⁹Tom Garvin, The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1981), 29-30. Elliott, 16.

¹⁰William Henry Curran, The Life of the Right Honourable John Philpot Curran (New York: William H. Creagh, 1820), 206.

¹¹Charles Glidden Haines, Memoir of Thomas Addis Emmet (New York: G & C & H Carvill, 1829), 43-44.

¹²Elliott, xiii.

¹³John Hall Stewart, "The Irish Press During the French Revolution," Journalism Quarterly, XXXIX, 1962, 516.

¹⁴McDowell, Imperialism, 363. Also R.B. McDowell, "United Irish Plans of Parliamentary Reform, 1793," Irish Historical Studies, III, #9, 1942, 39.

¹⁵Excerpt from pamphlet written by Archibald Hamilton Rowan, Report of the Trial of Archibald Hamilton Rowan, Esq. (New York: Tiebout and O'Brien, 1794), 46-48. Also McDowell, "United Irish Plans," 39.

¹⁶Society of the United Irishmen, Proceedings of the Society of United Irishmen of Dublin (Philadelphia: Jacob Johnson, and Co., 1795), Manuscripts and Rare Books Department, Swem Library, College of William and Mary, 26.

¹⁷Tandy was a Dublin merchant who acted as first secretary to Dublin club. In February 1793, Tandy and Archibald Hamilton Rowan were prosecuted as members of the "Defenders." Facing an extended prison sentence, Tandy fled to the United States, where he remained until United Irish negotiations with the French in 1798 brought him to Paris. James Whittier, (ed.), Speeches of John Philpot Curran While at the Bar, (Chicago: Calaghan and Company, 1877), 402-403.

¹⁸William Wolfe Tone, (ed.), Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1826), I, Manuscripts and Rare Books Department, Swem Library, College of William and Mary, 43, 55.

¹⁹"Letter from William Drennan to his brother-in-law, Samuel McTier, 21 May 1791," D.A. Chart (ed.), The Drennan Letters 1776-1819 (Belfast: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1931), 54.

²⁰"Report from the Committee of Secrecy of the House of Lords in Ireland," F. William Torrington, (ed.), House of Lords Sessional Papers, session 1798-99, III, (Dobbs Ferry: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1974), 233.

²¹William Hamilton Drummond, (ed.), The Autobiography of Archibald Hamilton Rowan, Esq. (Dublin: Thomas Tegg and Co., 1840), 155.

²²"Memoir of the State Prisoners, O'Connor, Emmet, McNevin, 14 September 1798," in Viscount Robert Stuart Castlereagh, Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh, Second Marquis of Londonderry Edited by His Brother, Charles Vane, Marquess of Londonderry (London: Henry Colburn, Publisher, 1848), I, 354.

²³Rowan, 160.

²⁴Society of United Irishmen, 40.

²⁵Elliott, xiii.

²⁶Goodwin, 424.

²⁷Society of United Irishmen, 46.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., 141.

³⁰Ibid., 10.

³¹Curran, 206.

³²David Dickson, "Taxation and Disaffection in Late Eighteenth-Century Ireland," in Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest Samuel Clark and James S. Donnelly (eds.), (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 53.

³³Lords Papers, III, 153-154.

³⁴"Exam of Thomas Addis Emmet, Esq, 11 August 1798," Lords Papers, III, 192.

³⁵Goodwin, 423.

³⁶William Grimshaw, Incidents Recalled or Sketches From Memory (Philadelphia: G.B. Ziebar and Co., 1848), Manuscripts and Rare Books Department, Swem Library, College of William and Mary, 23.

³⁷Elliott, 52, 53.

³⁸Ibid., 53.

³⁹Ibid., 59-60.

⁴⁰Oswald, although an American had joined forces with the Anglo-Irish exiles in Paris that were promoting the idea of a British revolution. He also held a commission in the French service.

⁴¹Lord Edward Fitzgerald was the son of the Duke of Leinster and a descendent of one of Ireland's oldest and wealthiest landowning families. Fascinated by the French Revolution his wife Pamela was rumored to be the illegitimate daughter of Philippe "Egalite," the Duc d'Orleans. Elliott, 25.

⁴²McDowell, Imperialism, 504. Also Elliott, 60-61.

⁴³Goodwin, 424-425 and R.R. Palmer, The Age of the Democratic Revolution: The Struggle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 496-497.

⁴⁴John Binns, Recollections of the Life of John Binns (Philadelphia: Parry and M'Millan, 1854), 26.

⁴⁵R. Barry O'Brien (ed.), The Autobiography of Theobald Wolfe Tone 1763-1798, (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1893), I, 202-203 in editor's notes.

⁴⁶Goodwin, 425-427 and Patrick Byrne, Lord Edward Fitzgerald (Dublin: The Talbot Press Limited, 1955), 140-141.

⁴⁷Rowan, 210-211

⁴⁸McDowell, Imperialism, 442.

⁴⁹O'Brien (ed.), I, 205.

⁵⁰Goodwin, 425-427.

⁵¹Binns, 26-28.

⁵²Goodwin, 427.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid., 429.

⁵⁵Elliott, 73.

⁵⁶Goodwin, 387-88.

⁵⁷McDowell, Imperialism, 520, 552, 557, and Edith Mary Johnston, Ireland in the Eighteenth Century, (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan Ltd., 1974), 187.

⁵⁸Martyn Lyons, France Under the Directory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 190-191. Also McDowell, Imperialism, 358-359.

⁵⁹McDowell, Imperialism, 503.

⁶⁰Elliott, 56-57. More in-depth description can be found in Denis Woronoff, The Thermidorean Regime and the Directory 1794-1799 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 81.

⁶¹Elliott, 81-82.

⁶²Carnot was one of the two most influential Directors of the time who sought all-out war against England. General Clarke was a second-generation Irishman and one of Carnot's chief disciples. He was at the head of the Cabinet Topographique et Geographique in the War Ministry and believed that the Irish would favor a restoration of a Stuart monarch rather than a republic. Elliott, 85.

⁶³Ibid., 83, 87.

⁶⁴McDowell, Imperialism, 505.

⁶⁵O'Brien, (ed.), I, 261.

⁶⁶Ibid., 287.

⁶⁷McDowell, Imperialism, 506.

⁶⁸Elliott, 77-79.

⁶⁹McDowell, Imperialism, 507.

⁷⁰Exam of McNevin, Lords Papers, III, 181. Also McDowell, Imperialism, 507.

⁷¹Goodwin, 429-430.

⁷²O'Brien, (ed.), II, 166.

⁷³McDowell, Imperialism, 509.

⁷⁴Ibid., 510 and Palmer, 498.

⁷⁵"Letter from Vice Admiral Kingsmill, Cork Harbour, 29 December 1796," Lords Papers, III, 607.

⁷⁶O'Brien, (ed.), II, 173.

⁷⁷Palmer, 498.

⁷⁸Goodwin, 429-430.

⁷⁹McDowell, Imperialism, 514.

⁸⁰Elliott, 124.

CHAPTER III

Citizen Soldiers, To Arms!

As the year 1798 unfolded and disastrous events of Bantry Bay in 1796 faded to little more than a bad memory in the minds of most men, the Society of United Irishmen and their growing number of followers reorganized their ranks and faced the future with a renewed sense of hope and optimism for the cause of a wholly independent Ireland. Their anticipation was not without warrant, for before them loomed both the beginning and the end of their long awaited struggle for Irish liberty. This was to be an eventful year. For years afterward, it was remarked that "Never was there an era in the history of any country which, in so short a space of time, gave birth to such numerous and varied circumstances as did the memorable year 1798 in Ireland."¹

While Bantry Bay represented a dismal failure of the past relations between the United Irishmen and France, many men remained firmly committed to the idea of an Irish revolution supported with and supplied by French military and financial assistance. Even those few United Irishmen who "wished to accomplish a Revolution in this country (Ireland) without the intervention of the French," agreed that "they would join the French" because they knew their goal could not be achieved without outside help.² It was a widely held belief among most United Irishmen

that French intervention was imperative if full independence from England was to be actually achieved.

Bantry Bay had provided several valuable lessons. By 1798, the United Irishmen knew that they were dependent upon an "Irish populace" that was nothing more than "an agricultural population, full of vigor, burning for the conflict, and long inured to the habits of insurrection."³ Although the intentions of the general population were noble; as the men who would form the mass of the rebel infantry, they lacked professional weapons, military discipline, and battlefield skill. The United Irishmen presumed that the presence of the French on Irish soil, would not only supply the necessary military leadership and weapons to fuel a rebellion, but would also lend ideological cohesion and a strong sense of purpose to the fight. As a result of many internal calls for renewed action towards revolution, the Directory of the United Irishmen decided to restore its diplomatic relations with the French.

As part of the United Irishmen's most determined effort to solicit money, arms, and military leadership from the French, they resolved to establish an even more structured line of communication and correspondence between themselves and the French Directory. To do so, a resident United Irish Minister to Paris was appointed. Edward John Lewins, a Dublin attorney and prominent Catholic member of the United Irishmen was selected to be the first such representative. He was sent to Paris in April 1797 under the assumed name of Thompson, "to act as the Minister of the Irish Republican Directory at Paris."⁴ In June of the same year, he was joined by a second United Irish "messenger," Dr. William James McNevin. Together, they were to plead the cause of liberty

in Ireland in the hope that once again the French would offer their assistance.

While Lewins and McNevin worked in Paris, preparations for the revolt were underway in Ireland. By early 1798, the United Irishmen and their many followers considered themselves to be fairly well prepared for a revolt of substantial magnitude. While they still lacked the essential military leadership, weapons, and considerable financial support needed to wage a successful revolt, they had high hopes that their French "compatriots" would come to their rescue in the end. Most importantly, they had inspiration. The United Irishmen were particularly successful in cultivating a belief among their fellow countrymen that "the people alone are the fountain of all just power, and that to their freely chosen delegates belongs the right of exercising authority over the nation."⁵ The organization had done a first-rate job of infusing the Irish masses with a strong sense of anger at their present conditions, while at the same time it instilled them with the hope of a bright future under United Irish leadership. To the United Irishmen, it seemed that few of their fellow men could resist their optimistic predictions for a new Ireland. They felt that they offered something for everyone. While "they (the United Irishmen) promised to the Presbyterians an irresistible lure, that of over-turning the Constitution, and of raising a Republic on its ruins," to the Catholics they hinted at "a rich and splendid establishment of a Popish Hierarchy under the protection of the French, provided they joined them in establishing a Republican form of Government."⁶

The rebellion was scheduled to begin on May 23, 1798. By April, the

United Irishmen felt that all of Ireland was ready to wage a substantial fight against the British. In reality, only isolated regions were prepared for such a revolution. The province of Ulster was one such region (see map 1). As the stronghold of the organization, there were reported to be upwards of 100,000 men ready to take the field in Ulster in defense of their national liberty. More importantly, these men were sufficiently equipped and fairly well trained. This was perhaps the only area where the men were actually supplied with pikes, muskets, other firearms, and even had some cannons and ammunition. Despite Ulster's readiness, most rebels across Ireland remained unprepared and ill-equipped to wage a battle of any significant proportions.⁷

Unfortunately, the rebellion that was launched on May 23, 1798 was not the "great revolutionary upheaval" that was originally planned. It began as scheduled in Dublin and the nearby counties of Wexford and Wicklow and quickly spread eastward into Leinster and north to Ulster (see map 1). However, this was by no means the "national rising" that the United Irish leaders intended, "in which the popular forces, . . . joined by many Irish soldiers in the government ranks and supported by France, would overwhelm the demoralized adherents of a discredited regime."⁸ Instead, information leaked to the Anglo-Irish government about the planned insurrection resulted in the arrests of 13 members of the Leinster Directory and 3 national Directors of the United Irishmen in March 1798. This action deprived the United Irishmen of their primary structure of leadership in the two crucial months before the rebellion and only aggravated the unpreparedness of the rebel ranks. Those United Irishmen next in line had to scramble to take control

quickly, even though they were unprepared for the duty. As a result, operations were poorly coordinated and somewhat disorganized. Most importantly, fighting was confined to those wealthier counties of the north, east, and south, where support for and participation in the United Irishmen had always been the strongest.⁹

Despite many events that did not go according to plan, the rebellion of 1798 was a revolt of significant proportions. By its conclusion several months later, it was estimated that approximately eighty thousand of those involved were killed--fifty thousand rebels and thirty thousand on the side of England.¹⁰ Fighting was reported to be fierce. The rebellion was the ideal opportunity for Irishmen to vent their long-held anger upon their English oppressors. It was the rebels who were most often blamed for every destruction of property, pillaging of land, or death of an innocent person that occurred. By the summer and fall of 1798, it was said that "the midland and southern counties" were "distinguished in barbarity, resorting, in addition to murder and robbery, to the ancient practices of burning the corn and houghing the cattle of those against whom their rage was directed."¹¹ It seemed that all over Ireland, "massacres in cold blood--house burnings--military executions--whole districts depopulated--tortures--flagellations, submersions, and imprisonments, appeared on every side."¹²

By all accounts, large areas of Ireland were in a state of chaotic upheaval. Anglo-Irish newspapers and periodicals of the time were filled with tales of death and destruction from both sides. The British were particularly interested in the accounts of what they considered to be the "evil" deeds of the Irish rebels. While many of these stories were based

upon truths, they were often exaggerated to fuel anti-Irish sentiment among loyalists. There were tales of conspiracies between blacksmiths and carpenters who had been supplied with iron and wood to make pikes for the rebels. In Ireland, a common fear circulated among many wealthy landowners that servants had been contracted by the rebels to kill their masters in exchange for the permanent possession of their estates once a republic was established.¹³ The involvement of women was regarded with particular distaste by the loyalists. One English newspaper noted that "the fanaticism which unhappily pervades the greater part of Ireland, appears to have reached even the female sex. A lady, . . . actually put on the green, or rebel uniform, marched in the ranks of the insurgents, and shot several men with her own hand."¹⁴ While the rebels "proceeded in no gentle way in many neighbourhoods" took "money, arms, and property" and stained "their progress. . . with the blood of many innocent people," they were by no means solely responsible for the many atrocities committed against their fellow countrymen.¹⁵ A gentleman recalled that "the instruments employed of death and torture, though dissimilar, were alike destructive: the bullet, sabre, bayonet, lash, and halter" were "met by the pike, the scythe, the blunderbuss, the hatchet, and the firebrand."¹⁶

With the rebellion underway, it appeared to outside observers that the United Irishmen had "fully organized its form and political existence" to form a substantial force to be reckoned with by the British.¹⁷ The reality of the rebel situation was quite different. There was only a small contingent of rebel leaders who coordinated some of the operations. Much of the actual fighting was carried out

independently of Society leaders by the peasants of Ireland, who had strong ties to their land and numerous loyalties to their fellow countrymen.¹⁸ As participants in a rebellion that offered them the hope of secured lands and full political rights, these men assembled themselves into poorly armed, and largely unguided mobs that faced their opponents bravely, motivated only by the most immediate and tangible objectives. While they had the might to "sweep forward with the irresistible and frightening force of a confident, determined crowd," they were also easily discouraged by any and all failures, no matter how small.¹⁹

Although it seemed that "the whole Irish nation, with the exception of persons pre-corrupted by the English Government, was animated by the same spirit" of revolution,²⁰ support was not really so widespread. It was reported that the rebels resorted to recruiting many "volunteers" by force, because they desperately needed to increase their fighting ranks. There were stories of how farmers were attacked by United Irishmen in their homes at night and threatened with death if they did not take the oath of secrecy and join their fellow countrymen in revolt.²¹ Nonetheless, the United Irishmen and their fellow rebels did have certain distinct advantages that they used wisely to achieve several early victories over their Anglo-Irish opponents. They knew how to play upon the pro-rebel sympathies of some of the governmental troops stationed in Ireland. They were also accustomed to Ireland's wild and mountainous terrain and used such knowledge to launch successful surprise attacks on the British.²²

In the long run, the disorganized, poorly equipped, and largely

untrained rebels were no match for the combined forces of the British and Irish governments. From the start of the revolt in May 1798, the Irish administration responded with several decisive measures designed to quell the fighting and restore law and order to Ireland as quickly as possible. On May 24, 1798, martial law was declared. Issued by the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Lord Camden, this decree threatened "to punish all persons acting, aiding, or in any manner assisting in the Rebellion which now exists in this Kingdom."²³ While the imposition of martial law did put a damper on some revolutionary activities when it was carried out properly, governmental troops often abused its tenets to inflict revenge upon their opponents. It was said that "the commercial exchange of Dublin formed a place of execution; even suspected rebels were every day immolated as if convicted on the clearest evidence."²⁴

Governmental forces quickly asserted their superiority on the battlefield, despite the guerilla-like tactics of the Irish rebels. After all, the Anglo-Irish government had a considerable military force at its disposal that was designed to combat the rebels, maintain internal order, and defend against possible French invasion forces. With 4,600 regular cavalry, 2,600 regular infantry, 2,000 fencible cavalry, 1,800 fencible infantry, 25,000 militiamen, and 40,000 yeomen stationed in Ireland in 1798 they simply out-numbered their opponents.²⁵ They were also trained, clothed, and armed. Their only disadvantage was that many of their members were not the most respectable or well educated Irishmen. The yeomanry was a source of considerable trouble. Because Ireland had so many absentee landlords, this force was drawn largely from a class of Irishmen who had little education or experience, and no family titles.

During the insurrection, they rose in rank quickly and in "their new charecters, they bustled and bravadoed; and sometimes from mere ignorance, and sometimes in the certainty of party support or public indemnity, they overleaped the bounds of law."²⁶

Faced with a rebellion that was dying quickly, the United Irishmen were both baffled and angered by the lack of response from their "compatriots" in France. After all, military and financial assistance from the French had been a prerequisite for the rebellion, they were simply unaware of more recent political developments in France. Dispatches sent from Paris to Ireland in October 1797 had reaffirmed French intentions following Bantry Bay. The first of these messages contained a renewal of the "former assurances of friendship and support given by the Directory of the French Republick." The second "announced that the projected invasion of Ireland would be made in the month of April 1798" to correspond with the native rebellion scheduled for May 23, 1798.²⁷

Encouraged by such assurances, the United Irishmen had few reasons to doubt the sincerity of the French in the days before the outbreak of the rebellion. Naturally, the failure of the French to arrive in April puzzled the United Irish leaders and promoted a sense of confusion and indecision within the rebel organization. In Paris, the first reports of the fighting and the early rebel successes arrived in mid-June, 1798. Those United Irishmen still in France immediately petitioned the French Directory for aid to their fellow countrymen.²⁸ On July 14, 1798, the Directory finally issued a statement on the Irish situation that offered the rebels little hope of assistance. The French noted that although

"the Irishmen who were fighting for all Europe were worthy of honour" and "should be supported," the Directory was "very conscious how little effective help could be sent."²⁹

The foreign policy of France had undergone major revisions since Ireland's receipt of the October 1797 dispatches. These changes reflected other alterations in the balance of internal political power in France. As leadership in the Directory changed from one group of men to another and as General Napoleon Bonaparte gained more political clout with each of his military victories, policy priorities were reassessed. While in the past, the French had never demonstrated any real desire "to send any force to Ireland, except such as, from its magnitude, might not only give them the hopes of conquering the Kingdom, but of retaining it afterwards as a French conquest," an invasion of Ireland had always offered them the hope of destroying their enemy, Great Britain.³⁰ However, by 1798, Ireland was no longer the only strategic possibility. As a result, the Irish rebellion floundered without their much-needed foreign assistance.

Since the fall of 1797, the military-strategic balance on the European continent had shifted in France's favor, so that by 1798, France was in the position to select both the time and place for the decisive strike against Great Britain. Their original plan focused solely upon a full-scale invasion of Ireland in which they would make landings at several points along the Irish coast to distract the British government and to urge uprisings across the country. However, this plan was never put into action. At the last minute, the Directory was advised by Napoleon Bonaparte (now commander of the Army of England) and Talleyrand

(successor to Delacroix as the Minister of Foreign Affairs) not to risk a channel invasion. Consequently, preparations for the mission were suspended.³¹ Instead, with little consideration for the cause of Irish independence, it was decided that Napoleon would lead the French Army of the East on a massive invasion of Egypt. This campaign sailed on May 19, 1798, just before the scheduled Irish rebellion was about to begin. The attack on Egypt was a move designed to threaten Britain's economic resources in India and gain France an alliance with the Ottoman Sultan. In reality, it did little to weaken England and only reactivated the war in the Mediterranean and opened the way for a Second Coalition.³²

Guided by the words of Napoleon and involved in the preparations for the Egyptian campaign, "French officials ignored the strategic possibilities inherent in a blow against British power in Ireland."³³ With all attentions focused upon the actions in the Mediterranean, the outbreak of the Irish revolt in May, 1798 was at first regarded by the French as a minor incident. Interested only in the military-strategic balance of Europe, the French saw little need to support an internal class struggle. What very few officials in the French government realized was that a large-scale invasion of Ireland would have been no more costly than their ill-fated campaign in Egypt. Only later did some men acknowledge that Ireland could have proven to be a far greater threat to Great Britain. While it was unlikely that an Irish republic would have been created, a long French occupation of Ireland would have deprived England of many economic resources and would have given the French Directory an excellent bargaining chip to use against their rival in later negotiations.³⁴ It appeared that Napoleon was to blame for

such mistakes. Many in Ireland believed that:

at no period in his life was Napoleon Bonaparte known to favor a descent on Ireland. The cause of this disinclination was believed to be because the Executive Directory of the United Irishmen would never agree that Ireland should become a dependency of France. All their negotiations were based upon the principle that Ireland was to be aided and regarded as an ally, and when independent, and recognized in that character, the French government to be paid for whatever aid of men or money it should have furnished.³⁵

Upon the receipt of the news of the early victories of the Irish rebels, the French Directory took a more active interest in the events of Ireland. In a June 20, 1798 meeting between Theobald Wolfe Tone (now the official United Irish representative in Paris) and General Kilmaine (Napoleon Bonaparte's replacement as commander of the Army of England), it was explained that the French Directory was not anxious to invade Ireland, particularly since Napoleon had left behind few available troops or supplies for such a mission.³⁶ However, after continued reports of rebel successes and somewhat exaggerated tales of their strength, the members of the Directory decided that France should at least encourage the Irish rebels by sending munitions and a few thousand available troops. The French hoped that just their presence would provide "a strong enough force. . .to create a formidable revolutionary army by adding disciplined striking power to numbers and enthusiasm."³⁷

By mid-July, 1798, the French plans to invade Ireland and assist the rebels were nearly finalized. The Directory placed General Louis Cherin in overall command of what would be three separate expeditions to Ireland transporting a total of 8,000 French troops. As it was planned, three frigates under General Jean Joseph Humbert would sail from La Rochelle

with 1,000 troops. General Jean Hardy would follow him from Brest with another 2,400 men on seven ships. General Cherin would sail with the remaining troops only after the other two had landed safely in Ireland. However, problems doomed the French mission from its inception. They began when the government did not allot the necessary funds to supply the expeditions until July 22, 1798 and the money never arrived. After several weeks and the transfer of General Cherin to the Army of Italy, Humbert, with the smallest force, managed to secure enough money to start the mission from the pay-master of La Rochelle. He finally sailed from that port on August 6, 1798.³⁸

General Humbert, now second in command to Hardy of France's rag-tag "l'armee d'Irlande" was advised to land his troops in Donegal, in a port on Ireland's north-western shore. Once he and his troops disembarked, they were to surround themselves with Irishmen known for "their devotion to liberty" and to set up provisional governments with civil and military functions in those towns under French control.³⁹ Instead, Humbert and his troops reached Killala Bay (south of Donegal) by the middle of August (see maps 3 & 4). They sat off of the Irish coast for two days and waited for a convenient time to disembark. Humbert's three frigates were spotted by British lookouts, who at first thought that they were English ships. A boat carrying five men was launched from the Irish coast to see if these "English" ships needed supplies, but when neither boat nor men returned, a call of alarm was issued.⁴⁰ When the French finally attempted to land on August 22, 1798, the Irish yeomanry was there to stop them. However, the French overwhelmed them in a minor skirmish and went on to take control of the town of Killala.

Once in command of the town, Humbert and his troops marched to the Bishop's palace, took prisoners of the Bishop and his two sons and raised the green flag of "Erin go Bragh" in a symbolic request to the local Irishmen to join them in the fight against England.⁴¹ He then issued a proclamation of French intentions that assured the Irish "that the French came in the quality of allies, to deliver, and not to conquer Ireland."⁴² Instead, the French sought to unite the men from both nations and "march to glory," because, as Humbert stated, the French "swear the most inviolable respect for your property, your laws, and all your religious opinions; be free, be masters of your own country, we look for no other conquest than that of your liberty, no other success than yours."⁴³

Despite such words of assurance, it was clear from the start that the French intended to be in full command of all military operations in Killala. While they claimed to have come from France to bolster Irish courage, share their dangers, and sacrifice their lives "in the sacred cause of Liberty," in reality, the French saw themselves as a "Band of Heroes," sent "to deliver you (Ireland) from the hands of Tyrants."⁴⁴ More importantly, the French would be Ireland's mentors. They would "teach you (Ireland) the arts of war, and to despise the low pursuits of toil and industry." They would raise the Irish peasants from their lowly social status to a new height where they too could "live on the spoils of war and the labours of others."⁴⁵

The French soon discovered that Killala was not the best choice for their landing. As part of the poorest province in Ireland (Connacht, see maps 1 & 3), it was no surprise that Killala and the surrounding region

of county Mayo were both unorganized and unprepared for rebellion. Furthermore, because the United Irishmen had little to no following in this rural, agricultural area of Ireland, few people had even heard much news of the revolt raging in the east. As part of a close-knit domestic economy, the people of Killala lived simple existences as the tenants of wealthy landowners.⁴⁶ There was little time left for political organization. Rather, in most families "the men fed the family with their labor in the field, and the women paid the rent by spinning."⁴⁷ Uninformed and somewhat uninterested, it was no wonder that the "immediate reaction of the country people to the French landing seems to have been bafflement."⁴⁸

While the Irish leaders of the rebellion hoped that the arrival of the French upon Irish soil would add enough momentum to rekindle the dying rebellion in the east, the early events in Killala offered them little hope of success. According to the agreements made in Paris, the French brought the Irish their much-needed engineers, artillery men, and officers, along with weapons and ammunition. The United Irishmen promised to provide the required man-power. It was accepted by both sides, that if the French supplied the field leadership and necessary supplies, the Irish peasants would form the mass of the infantry.⁴⁹ In Paris, the United Irishmen had assured the French that upon their arrival "instantly all the patriots capable of serving would hasten to the French colours."⁵⁰ Instead, once Humbert and his troops were in Ireland, they found that only a few local United Irishmen and about 800 volunteers were willing to leave their fields at harvest time and join them in revolt.

Most of the Irishmen that joined the French were a military

liability. These peasant "insurgents" needed to be fully armed, clothed in uniform, and drilled. With only a very limited time available to them, the French could do little to educate the Irish in the use of professional arms and had to accept their undisciplined behavior and unreliable attitudes.⁵¹ The French were shocked by the poverty that characterized the population of County Mayo (see map 3). They were also angered by the peasants' apparent laziness and general lack of enthusiasm for the cause of Irish liberty.⁵² Bartholomew Teeling, Humbert's aide-de-camp, remarked that "the country-people were very ill-behaved. (They) came in, got arms and clothes, and ran away. . . their sole object was plunder. (We) shot two of them."⁵³ However, dissatisfaction was common on both sides. Many of the more educated volunteers that fought with the French expected to be treated with more respect and given a greater share of responsibility. They were "highly incensed at their new Allies, who, . . . placed them in the front ranks, and made them bear the whole brunt" of the fighting.⁵⁴

While the French and their Irish partners desperately tried to overcome their differences to create a united front of opposition to British tyranny, many Anglo-Irish officials compared the crisis in Ireland to the state of affairs in North America in the 1770s. Charles James Fox, leader of the opposition in Parliament, had warned of the seriousness of any Irish rebellion as early as March 1797.⁵⁵ However, once it began, both Irish and British officials hoped that the French would not get involved. While all agreed that "if the rebels should not have the co-operation of a French army," the British could "put them down" quite easily, "if the French should be able to throw a force of

five thousand men on any part of our coasts, it would render the result very dubious."⁵⁶

Naturally, the August 30, 1798 news of the arrival of French military forces on Irish soil was greeted by calls of alarm by those in London. Although British accounts of the landing of the estimated 800 Frenchmen referred to it as a "petty invasion of Killala," many officials were worried nonetheless.⁵⁷ The rebellion in Ireland was being suppressed quickly and successfully by the Anglo-Irish troops. It was feared that this off-hand attempt made by the French to assist their Irish comrades would only encourage new and more bloody insurrections all across the Irish countryside. They thought that "the enemy would be presented as much more powerful than he really was" and that "a confidence in French support," would "revive all the disorders which were nearly cured in the sister kingdom."⁵⁸

In spite of Ireland's substantial military force, many in the Anglo-Irish government recognized that additional help was needed. With Humbert and his troops stationed in Killala, many feared that "unless Great Britain poured an immense force into Ireland the country would be lost."⁵⁹ Not surprisingly, the British Parliament responded to such requests promptly and sent additional troops. The overall command was transferred from the hands of General Gerard Lake to those of General Charles Cornwallis. While Lake was regarded as a "brave, cool, collected man," he did not have the "resources adequate to the critical situation in which he was placed."⁶⁰ In a conflict that often demanded guerilla-style tactics, a strong and decisive leader was needed. Cornwallis was appointed to the dual role of Lord Lieutenant and

Commander in Chief of the military forces. As the replacement of both Lord Camden and General Lake, he had control of Ireland's civil and military affairs.⁶¹ The British recognized wisely "that the conspiracy which was being carried on in Ireland had 'to be treated in a different manner to an election mob or a drunken riot' in England."⁶²

Meanwhile in Ireland, Humbert and his rag-tag group of Irish rebels marched southward from Killala. Their destination was Ireland's midland and eastern counties, where they hoped to unite with the other more organized and better supplied rebel forces. After the successful capture of Ballina (see maps 3 & 4), they marched onwards hurriedly in the hope of capturing as much territory as possible before a meeting with a large contingent of Anglo-Irish forces. While Humbert and the rebels marched from Ballina, 4,000 governmental troops under the command of Major General John Hely-Hutchinson (the commander of the government forces of the province) prepared to check the French at Castlebar (only 22 miles away from Killala, see maps 3 & 4). Hely-Hutchinson and his men were waiting at Castlebar when Humbert's forces arrived. They came on with enough "skill and élan" to initially scatter the Anglo-Irish forces. However, with Cornwallis and additional troops on the way, it was only a matter of time until the Franco-Irish rebels would be permanently defeated.⁶³

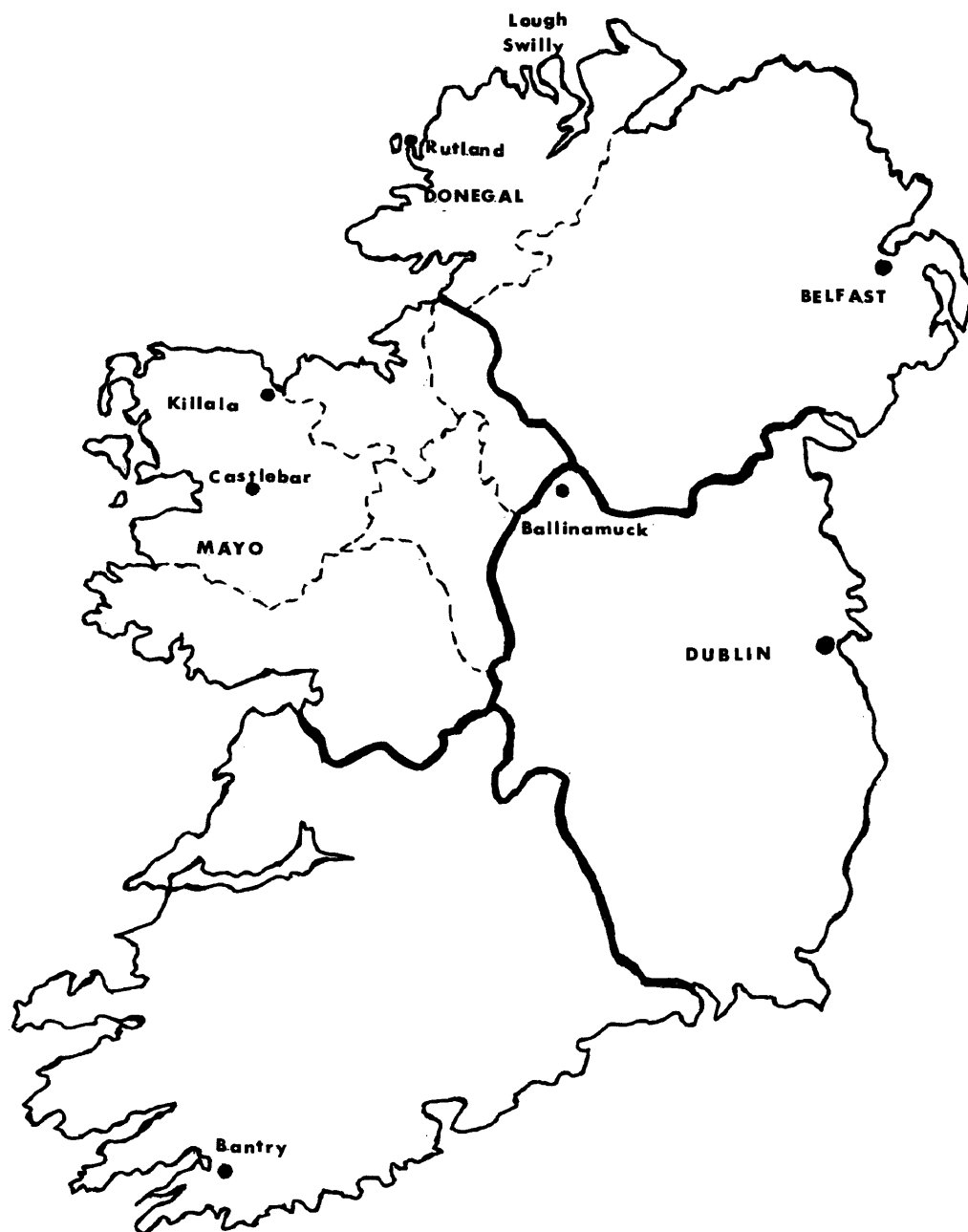
In temporary control of Castlebar, Humbert and his men scrambled to set up a new civil administration for the province of Connach and to prepare for their next clash with the British forces. Although they desperately needed to raise recruits and supplies, there was little time left, for Cornwallis in command of Ireland's Grand Army, assisted by the

forces of General Lake were fast approaching northeastward from Tuam (see map 4). Trapped in Castlebar, by September 1, Humbert and his men were on a quick retreat northwards into county Longford. In their hurry they left a considerable amount of artillery and ammunition behind, and relied upon stolen horses for much of their transportation. After eight days and several encounters with the Anglo-Irish troops that left a reported 1500 rebels and Frenchmen dead, Humbert and his 96 officers and 748 privates finally surrendered to Cornwallis at Ballinamuch in County Leitrim on September 9, 1798 (see maps 3 & 4).⁶⁴ As General Humbert and many of the French officers were led away as prisoners of the British government, the rebellion appeared to be over.

1798 was indeed a memorable year for the people of Ireland. With nearly 50,000 Irishmen dead, including many non-combatants, the rebellion had ravaged or destroyed vast areas of Ireland's eastern, northern, and southern counties.⁶⁵ As the revolt that was designed by the United Irishmen to lead to the creation of a fully independent republic, the rebellion of 1798 came to a quick and disappointing end only several months after it began with Humbert's surrender to the British at Ballinamuch. While events of 1798 demonstrated only too clearly the incompetence and disorganization of the United Irish-French "partnership," more importantly, the revolt had sharply illustrated to the Anglo-Irish authorities that Protestant and Catholic Irishmen could put aside their differences temporarily and assemble themselves into a formidable anti-British coalition. It remained to be decided in the future whether the British authorities would award the Irish a new amount of political and social respect, or whether they would punish the Irish

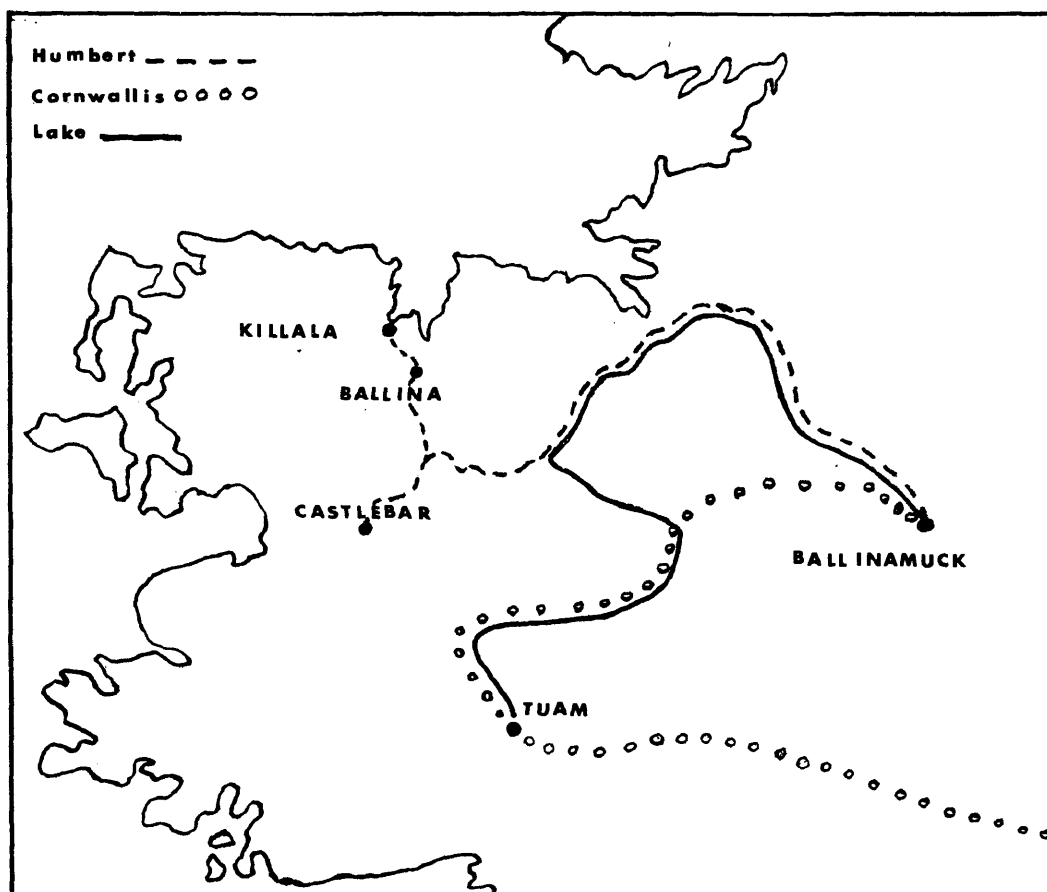
for their efforts with more restrictions and fewer political rights than ever before.

MAP 3
IRELAND



MAP 4

INVASION ROUTE - 1798



NOTES TO CHAPTER III

¹Sir Jonah Barrington, Personal Sketches of His Own Times, III (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1832), 260.

²F. William Torrington, (ed.), Information Given by Thomas Reynolds, Rebel before Committee of the House of Lords, II, 1798-99, appendix # XVI, House of Lords Sessional Papers (Dobbs Ferry: Oceana Publications, 1974), 317.

³William Henry Curran, The Life of the Right Honourable John Philpot Curran (New York: William H. Creagh, 1820), 211. Such opinions are also expressed in: R.B. McDowell, Ireland in the Age of Imperialism and Revolution 1760-1801 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1979), 514-516, W.E.H. Lecky, A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 347, and Marianne Elliott, Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 165.

⁴"Report from the Committee of Secrecy of the House of Lords," Lords Papers, II, 158 and Elliott, xx.

⁵from "An Account of the Treaty Between the United Irishmen and the Anglo-Irish Government in 1798 by William McNevin," in John T. Gilbert, ed., Documents Relating to Ireland, 1795-1804 (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1970), 232.

⁶The York Courant, July 23, 1798, #3637, (4), col. 1.

⁷"Report from the Committee of Secrecy," Lords Papers, II, 203 and Charles Ross, Esq., (ed.), Correspondence of Charles, First Marquis Cornwallis, II (London: John Murray, 1859), 340.

⁸quote from McDowell, 604. Also see John Binns, Recollections of the Life of John Binns (Philadelphia: Parry and M'Millan, 1854), 317.

⁹Curran, 219, McDowell, 604, and Steven Ross, Quest for Victory: French Military Strategy 1792-1799 (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1973), 179.

¹⁰Binns, 317, R.R. Palmer, The Age of the Democratic Revolution: The Struggle, II (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 491, and Richard Ingham, (ed.), A History of Gracehill (Gracehill Moravian Church, 1977), 24.

¹¹Excerpts from "Report of the Secret Committee-House of Commons, Dublin," in The London Chronicle, August 25-28, 1798, 195.

¹²Charles Glidden Haines, Memoir of Thomas Addis Emmet (New York: G & C & H Carvill, 1829), 60.

¹³York Courant, July 23, 1798, #3637 (4), col. 1.

¹⁴York Courant, June 11, 1798, #3631 (2), col. 3.

¹⁵Ingham, (ed.), 24.

¹⁶Barrington, 262.

¹⁷"Letter from M. Reinhard to M. de la Croix, 16 August, 1798," in Viscount Robert Stuart Castlereagh, Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh, Second Marquess of Londonderry Edited By His Brother, Charles Vane, Marquess of Londonderry (London: Henry Colburn, 1848), 288.

¹⁸Sir James O'Connor, History of Ireland 1798-1924, I (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1971), 61.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, and McDowell, 606.

²⁰Castlereagh, 288.

²¹Letter "From Right Honourable Thomas Pelham, House of Commons, 5 May 1797," in Gilbert, ed., 115.

²²Letter from Cornwallis to Duke of Portland, from Dublin Castle, 8 July 1798, Cornwallis Correspondence, II, 355.

²³York Courant, June 4, 1798, #3630 (1), col. 2.

²⁴Barrington, 267.

²⁵McDowell, 612-613.

²⁶Richard Lovell Edgeworth and daughter Maria Edgeworth, Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, II (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1969), 205-206.

²⁷"Report from the Committee of Secrecy of the House of Lords," Lords Papers, II, 160.

²⁸Elliott, 214, 217.

²⁹McDowell, 645.

³⁰"Report from the Committee of Secrecy," Lords Papers, II, 215.

³¹Cornwallis Correspondence, II, 388, Palmer, 498-499, and McDowell, 594-595.

³²Ross, 176 and Martyn Lyons, France Under the Directory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 201-202.

³³Ross, 177.

³⁴Ibid., 176-177.

³⁵Binns, 86.

³⁶Ross, 185-186.

³⁷McDowell, 645.

³⁸Ibid., and Ross, 186-187.

³⁹McDowell, 645.

⁴⁰The Times, London, September 11, 1798, 2D.

⁴¹McDowell, Imperialism, 646, Ross, 187, James Bentley Gordon, The History of the Civil War in Ireland, II (Baltimore: 1805), Manuscripts and Rare Books Department, Swem Library, College of William and Mary, 124-125, and excerpts from a letter from the Duke of Portland to the Lord Mayor of London, in the London Chronicle, August 25-28, 1798, 199.

⁴²From extract of "A Memorial relative to a Landing in Ireland" in Castlereagh, 304.

⁴³London Chronicle, September 8-11, 1798, 242.

⁴⁴Ibid., 241 and The Times, September 6, 1798, 3C.

⁴⁵The Times.

⁴⁶McDowell, 647 and observations made by Arthur Young in his 1776 tour through the region in Arthur Young, A Tour in Ireland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925), 79-80. For additional information on Killala also see Sean Jennett, Connacht (London: Faber & Faber, 1970), 169-170.

⁴⁷Young, 83.

⁴⁸McDowell, 647.

⁴⁹The Times, September 3, 1798, 3C and Lyons, 200-201.

⁵⁰Castlereagh, ed., 389.

⁵¹Ross, 187, Lyons, 200-201, Elliott, 225, and Franklin and Mary Wickwire, Cornwallis; The Imperial Years (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 225.

⁵²McDowell, 647 and a "Letter from Mr. Wickham to Lord Castlereagh taken from testimony of captured man," September 7, 1798, Castlereagh, 338.

⁵³Letter from Edmund Cooke, Esq. to William Wickham, Esq., Dublin Castle, September 11, 1798. Cornwallis Correspondence, II, 402.

⁵⁴London Chronicle September 8-11, 1798, 242.

⁵⁵"Debate on Mr. Fox's Motion Respecting the State of Ireland," March 23, 1797, in The Parliamentary History of England From the Earliest Period to the Year 1803, XXXIII (London: 1818), 149.

⁵⁶Letter "To Thomas Pelham from Honourable William Elliott, Under-Secretary, Military Department, Ireland," June 3, 1798, in Gilbert, (ed.), 126.

⁵⁷The Times August 31, 1798, 3C.

⁵⁸London Chronicle August 25-28, 1798, 200.

⁵⁹Letter of "Lord Camden to Thomas Pelham, Dublin Castle, 11 June 1798," in Gilbert, (ed.), 132.

⁶⁰Letter "To Thomas Pelham from Earl of Camden, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Dublin Castle, 6 June 1798," in Gilbert, (ed.), 126, 129.

⁶¹Wickwire, 221-222 and "Camden to Thomas Pelham, Dublin Castle, 15 June 1798," in Gilbert, (ed.), 138.

⁶²McDowell, 596.

⁶³McDowell, 647-649 and Gordon, 124-125.

⁶⁴McDowell, Gordon, 127, Edgeworth, 225, and The Times, September 15, 1798, 2B.

CHAPTER IV

Aftermath

The dramatic surrender of General Jean Humbert and his men to British General Cornwallis at Ballinamuck marked the symbolic end of the United Irishmen's seven-year struggle to transform Ireland into a fully independent republic. For the United Irishmen and their fellow rebels, the events of the three fateful months of 1798 were not only a great disappointment, but an even larger disaster. Because the rebellion of 1798 never gained the momentum or widespread support necessary to make it a national rising, it was put down far faster and easier than anyone in Ireland, France, or Great Britain ever expected.

Despite its quick defeat, the revolt of 1798 cannot be regarded as a wholly unsuccessful episode in the histories of Ireland, France, or Great Britain. After all, it "was as stunning an event to contemporaries in Ireland as 1789 had been to French men and women in France."¹ Although the insurrection lasted for a relatively brief period of time, its ramifications were felt for years to come in the future. In 1798, "the floor of organized society had collapsed" in Ireland, "and the established classes had suddenly awoken to the existence of passions and hatred which they had hitherto relegated comfortably to a primeval phase in Britain's conquest of Ireland" a few hundred years earlier.²

Although General Humbert's squadron was not the last outside effort to revive the dying Irish rebellion of 1798, it was the only one to make a successful landing on the Irish coast. Two other failed attempts followed in the days after Humbert's surrender. One week after the decisive events of September 9, 1798, James Napper Tandy (a former United Irish leader in exile) and his "Northern Army of Avengers," landed at Rutland, a small island situated off the coast of Ireland's county Donegal (see map 3). Tandy as "Chef de Brigade" was accompanied aboard the French ship "Anacreon" by French General Jean Pierre Antoine Rey and 60 other Irish exiles.³ Upon his arrival, Tandy anxiously "endeavoured, but with little success, to persuade the Fishermen of Rutland that he and his friends came to deliver them from their oppressors."⁴ To illustrate his intentions and win the support of his fellow countrymen, he issued two proclamations. Not surprisingly, "the fishermen continued unconvinced of their grievances, and the country people continued to hide in the mountains."⁵ Discouraged by their lack of response and sobered by the news of Humbert's fate, Tandy and his fellow exiles set sail the following day (September 17) on a return voyage to Dunkirk.

Napper Tandy was not alone in his last-ditch efforts to assist the Irish rebels. On September 16, 1798 Admiral Jean Bapiste Francois Bompard finally set sail from France with his squadron of six ships. Originally intended to be part of the French invasion forces accompanying General Humbert, Bompard, in command of the squadron overseen by General Hardy, had been held in port for nearly two months. Like Tandy, he was completely unaware of Humbert's surrender to the British at Ballinamuck. Therefore, it came as no surprise that Bompard's ship the "Hoche," with

Theobald Wolfe Tone aboard, was spotted and followed by a British ship soon after its departure. Following nearly a month of careful surveillance, Bompard and his 6 frigates were captured in mid-October by Sir J.B. Warren's squadron off Lough Swilly on Ireland's northwestern coast (see map 3).⁶ In London and Dublin, news of the capture of the "Hoche" was greeted with enthusiasm. Loyalists in Britain and Ireland were particularly pleased by reports that Theobald Wolfe Tone was among those crew members taken prisoner by the British. As "the ci-devant agent of the Popish Committee, founder of the United Irishmen, and root and source of all our (Ireland's) miseries for six years past,"⁷ it was a relief to many to know that Tone would cause no further unrest.

For those few men who remained active members of the Society of United Irishmen, the news of Tone's capture and subsequent death was the final blow to any hopes that still remained of reviving the dying rebellion. While Humbert's surrender to Cornwallis had splintered the core of the organization and scattered what remained of its mass following, the death of one of its principal leaders (Tone), marked the unofficial end of the Society and its seven-year struggle for Irish independence. Despite any early military victories, The United Irishmen and their rebel supporters were firmly and unquestionably defeated by the Anglo-Irish forces. As the disastrous culmination to nearly a decade of careful planning and negotiating, "the fatal 'ninety-eight'," virtually destroyed the Society of United Irishmen.⁸

With Humbert and his fellow French soldiers held as captives of the British, the Anglo-Irish governments had regained control of the Irish countryside and were taking decisive action to subdue further

insurrections. Not surprisingly, such events were catastrophic to the Society of United Irishmen. Although many members remained loyal to the principles and ideologies of their organization, none of the principal United Irish leaders remained active after 1798. While many men, (like Wolfe Tone) met their deaths at the hands of the British, many others sat in British or Irish prisons and waited uncertainly for news of their fate. Those men who remained free after the rebellion had wisely fled to safety in the United States or on the Continent. They hoped to avoid the court martial and certain death that possibly awaited them in Ireland.⁹

For those United Irishmen who had been directly involved in preparations for rebellion and negotiations with the French, the quick defeat of the rebels was a stunning blow to the morale of the Society. After all, the United Irishmen had acknowledged their needs for leadership, ammunition, and financial assistance from the very beginning and had gained the support of France to supply such shortcomings. Those men who organized the insurrection knew from their observations of events in America and France that "in a grand revolution there must be a division of labour." While "there must be some to speak, some to write, some to plan," there must also be "many to execute."¹⁰ The United Irishmen completely misjudged both the ability and the willingness of the great mass of their own people to rise against English social oppression and political domination. Although the United Irishmen had a sufficient number of men to speak, write, and plan for their revolution, they lacked the mass support of enough well-trained and ideologically devoted Irishmen to carry out their intentions.

Those Irishmen who did participate actively in the rebellion lacked

the advantages of education and military training that their leaders and so many of the royalists possessed. In most areas of Ireland, as the French had painfully discovered, the Irish rebels lived "in a state of total ignorance and beggary."¹¹ While most Irishmen could understand the basic reasons behind the calls to revolution, few could comprehend or identify with the many important and more complex political ideologies that formed the foundation of the rebellion. The events at Killala, best illustrated exactly how few rebels possessed the discipline and training needed to defeat the organized ranks of the Anglo-Irish military forces. While "their intrepidity was great, and their perserverance in the midst of fire and slaughter truly astonishing, . . . on every occasion it was obviously. . . not the leaders that spurred them into action."¹² The United Irishmen could incite the rebels into action with inflammatory remarks about British oppression, but once on the battlefield, they could neither control nor organize their fighting ranks. While the rebels fought fiercely because they were motivated by anger, it took only a few defeats by the Anglo-Irish troops to convince them that it was time to quit and leave the cause behind.¹³

While the Society of United Irishmen was nearly destroyed by the rebellion of 1798, Humbert's surrender to Cornwallis publicly disgraced the French. Their humiliating defeat in Ireland was a great blow to French national confidence. When compounded by other disastrous defeats in the Mediterranean and Egypt, the events in Ireland appeared to be a prelude of events in the future. By the end of 1798, Ireland had been the destination of four failed French military expeditions. While Banty Bay could be overlooked as an isolated incident of 1796, the French could

not deny the consecutive defeats or failures of Humbert, Tandy, and Bompard. Despite their own lack of foresight and improper planning, the French generally reacted to the news of Humbert's surrender with anger and disappointment. Many Frenchmen, particularly members of Humbert's defeated invasion forces, publicly denounced the Irish, their rebellion, and most importantly, French involvement in such an unworthy foreign cause.¹⁴

The defeat and capture of General Humbert was particularly humiliating for the French. Those Frenchmen who accompanied Humbert on the invasion of Killala were astonished by the contrast between their expectations and the reality of the Irish situation. Many of the French officers were accustomed to certain basic standards of living, cleanliness, and education. In western Ireland, (and particularly the region of County Mayo) the French were met by a peasant population of semi-savages.¹⁵ The Irishmen were uninformed of the rebellion raging in the east and its importance to the future of their nation. Frustrated by the apparently lazy and idle nature of the Irish, the French found relatively few recruits willing to fight with them. Many of the men who landed at Killala, felt that "they had been completely deceived as to the state of Ireland" by those United Irishmen in Paris. Encouraged by the reports of the early rebel successes, "They had expected to find the people in open rebellion, or, at least, . . . organized for insurrection; but to their dismay, they found only ragamuffins, . . . who, in joining their standard, did them infinitely more harm than good."¹⁶

In an effort to explain and justify their defeat, the French blamed the leaders of the United Irishmen for their false assessments of

Ireland's strength and dedication to the cause. The United Irishmen did after all, misjudge both the quality and quantity of their rebel supporters. However, French interest in an Irish invasion was motivated entirely by military and political considerations. From the start of negotiations in 1793, the United Irishmen had stressed their desire to create a totally independent republic through a large-scale rebellion against England. The French were willing to supply the Irish with the needed men, munitions, and money, but they did so in the hopes of destroying the British and retaining a strong influence upon Ireland. Despite the inflammatory rhetoric that Humbert and Tandy used to try to incite the Irish masses into revolt, the French had little real interest in promoting the political ideals of liberty and justice. Most French officers involved, regarded the Irish with an unrestrained contempt. They called the rebels "beggars, rascals, and savages" and "cursed without scruple their own Directory, for sending them, after they had, . . .conquered the world, to be beaten in an Irish bog." Many Frenchmen agreed with those of their fellow countrymen who swore that "they would never return to a country, where they could find neither bread, wine, nor discipline; and where the people lived on roots, whiskey, and lying."¹⁷

While the French suffered through the humiliating defeat of Humbert, loyalists across Britain and Ireland heaved a sigh of relief over Cornwallis' victory at Ballinamuck. This appeared to be the dramatic conclusion to a rebellion that had been the source of considerable fear and concern for the Anglo-Irish governments, even though many small-scale agrarian conflicts in the Irish countryside continued for the next

several years. The British government, Cornwallis, and Castlereagh (as Lord Lieutenant and Chief Secretary of Ireland) faced the difficult task of restoring peace and tranquility to a country torn apart by insurrection. Fearful of repercussions, Cornwallis and Castlereagh wisely agreed upon a policy of "'firmness and leniency'" in Ireland.¹⁸ While many of the rebel leaders would be punished, they decided to pardon those, "who had not been ringleaders in this rebellion; and who, repenting of their folly, were desirous to return to their allegiance, and to their peaceable duties."¹⁹

For those United Irish leaders who remained in state prisons, the British passed the Banishment Act in the summer of 1798. Agreed upon after negotiations with the state prisoners, this act was a compromise measure that offered something for both sides. From among the imprisoned United Irish leaders, several were selected to testify in front of a Parliamentary committee on the activities and intentions of their organization, as well as their connections with the French government. In exchange for such information, the Anglo-Irish government would allow them to emigrate to another country, freed from prosecution.²⁰ Thomas Addis Emmet, William MacNevin, and Arthur O'Connor were among those prisoners chosen to testify before the secret committee. Although their testimony was complete, their departure from Ireland was delayed. Many United Irish leaders were allowed to leave in early 1799, but those who testified were detained for political reasons. After they spent three years in a Scottish prison, they were finally allowed to move to the United States.²¹

Although many of those directly involved in the rebellion were

pardoned or exiled, many other Irishmen were tried and convicted in the state courts or before military tribunals. Moderation prevailed in the treatment of most rebels, but discipline was necessary if peace was to be restored. After all, the rebellion of 1798 frightened Anglo-Irish officials. While it was put down quite easily, this large-scale revolt of Ireland's masses was exactly what the British had feared for decades.²² Although it should have come as no surprise considering that "nowhere else the British went, . . . , did they treat the native inhabitants so severely, exploit them so ruthlessly, and display such a callous lack of concern for the results of their policies," the rebellion greatly undermined the power of British authority in Ireland.²³ The Irish were theoretically fellow countrymen of the British, but they were rarely accorded such respect. It was "only the Irish use of force, of violence so passionately strong as to threaten British ascendancy," during the rebellion of 1798 "that finally induced the . . . British to reexamine their Irish policies."²⁴

As the Irish people recovered from the tumultuous effects of insurrection, the Anglo-Irish governments began plans for sweeping political reforms in Ireland. Later culminating in the Irish Act of Union in 1801, these changes would give Irishmen greater political clout and social responsibility within the larger British empire. To governmental officials in Britain and Ireland, the rebellion of 1798 had only too clearly illustrated the desperate need for political and social change in Ireland, if it was to remain an integral part of the British Isles.

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

¹Oliver MacDonagh, States of Mind, A Study of Anglo-Irish Conflict 1780-1980 (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), 2.

²Ibid., 2-3.

³R.B. McDowell, Ireland in The Age of Imperialism and Revolution 1760-1801 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1979), 650, 644-646 and The Times, London, September 24, 1798, 2A.

⁴The Times, September 24, 1798, 2B.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Marianne Elliott, Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 234-235 and McDowell, 650.

⁷"Extract of a Letter from Dublin, November 2, 1798," The London Chronicle, November 6-8, 1798, 446. Also see: William Henry Curran, The Life of the Right Honourable John Philpot Curran (New York: William H. Creagh, 1820), 271, 272-274. Tone's fate was not pleasant. He was brought to trial in Dublin on November 10, 1798, was court-martialed and sentenced to death by hanging. On the day of his execution (November 12), he cut his throat and died seven days later.

⁸Sir Jonah Barrington, Personal Sketches of His Own Times, III (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1832), 265 and Elliott, 239-240.

⁹Elliott.

¹⁰Charles Glidden Haines, Memoir of Thomas Addis Emmet (New York: G & C & H Carvill, 1829), 61.

¹¹Barrington, III, 263.

¹²Ibid., 289.

¹³Haines, 60.

¹⁴Richard Lovell Edgeworth and his daughter Maria Edgeworth, Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, II (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1969), 235-236 and Albert Goodwin, The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 430.

¹⁵Elliott, 231.

¹⁶Edgeworth, II, 235-236.

¹⁷Ibid. For general discussion of the French reaction see: Elliott, 231-233.

¹⁸McDowell, 652-653.

¹⁹Edgeworth, II, 234.

²⁰McDowell, 654-658 and Haines, 66-67.

²¹McDowell, 657-658 and Haines, 72, 74-77.

²²McDowell, 659.

²³Franklin and Mary Wickwire, Cornwallis, The Imperial Years (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 209.

²⁴Ibid.

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